PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

VOLUME THREE

DICTIONARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is the reference manual on appropriate techniques for public involvement programs. It is divided into two parts: **Part 1** contains the general introductory overview, followed by three chapters which provide detailed information on some of the most commonly used techniques. **Part 2** contains the **"Dictionary of Techniques"**. This is a comprehensive directory of all of the available techniques in public involvement, including those which are relatively recent in development.

HOW TO USE THIS VOLUME

First, a caution: before attempting to employ any of the techniques in this reference volume, it is essential to be familiar with Volume 2 which outlines the process for developing a public involvement program.

Second: The reader is not expected to read this manual from cover to cover. The techniques are presented and organized to enable a project manager to key in to those particular techniques compatible with the approach intended, and with the public involvement objectives to be achieved.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING TECHNIQUES

Techniques can be selectedusing Table 1 as a guide. However, it is critical to understand that most techniques can be used in many different ways, depending on the resources employed, the information employed, the objectives of the program, and the depth of the program.

Techniques act as facilitators; they are a necessary part of a public involvement program, but they are not sufficient by themselves to ensure effective public involvement. The techniques should be used as part of an overall public involvement plan, integrated into the decision making process.

Similarly, a program can be using the best technique(s) available, but if the agency lacks sincerity, integrity and commitment about the value of public involvement, the

public will be skeptical and the program will fail.

Virtually all of the techniques outlined in this volume need to be employed with, at a minimum, the advice of someone experienced and trained in public involvement.

There is no one single best technique for a given activity in a project. Any one of a number of techniques may be appropriate; how effective they are depends as much on the people in the program and their flexibility in handling issues as on the specific content of the techniques. It is always possible to change a public involvement plan and incorporate new or different techniques. Similarly, the public can change during the process; at different points or stages, different techniques may be necessary.

It is advisable to use several techniques in a program, rather than to rely on just one. Different techniques will reach different groups of people, and some are appropriate to accomplish one involvement objectives, and others a different objective.

THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

While many systems have been developed for classifying public involvement programs and techniques, one that has proven to be useful is outlined in Figure 1.

The danger of showing techniques on a continuum is that it is easy to assume that there is only one consensus building technique appropriate to a particular situation. In fact, during the course of a complex decision it may be desirable to use a wide variety of techniques.

The techniques in this manual fall into one of five categories:

- ❑ public information/ education
- ❑ information feedback
- ❑ consultation
- ❑ extended involvement
- ❑ joint planning

The survey of federal agencies and departments in February and March 1987, identified the need for further information on consultation, extended involvement and joint planning techniques in particular. Public information and information feedback techniques can be used on their own or in conjunction with one of the more in-

Figure 1
A Continuum of Public Involvement Approaches and Selected Techniques[1]

"Knowledge about a decision"	**Public Information** Advertising Newspaper Inserts with Reply Cards
"Being heard before the decision"	**Public Information Feedback** Briefs Focus Groups
"Having an influence on the decision"	**Consultation** Public Meetings (traditional format) Conferences Workshops/Problem-Solving Meetings **Extended Involvement** Advisory Groups/Task Forces/Charrettes
"Agreeing to the decision"	**Joint Planning** Consultation/Mediation/Negotiation/Niagara Process

1. Note: This chart presents a continuum of public involvement approaches. You, as the practitioner, must determine what it is that you want to achieve in terms of involvement. It is then up to you to identify the most appropriate approaches/technologies/actions which you will need to use to achieve these ends.

volvement-oriented approaches.

Each of the general approaches is defined in the following pages. The remainder of the chapter then discusses factors which affect the selection of an overall approach.

❑ Public Information

The simplest form of communication with the public is to keep them informed about ongoing agency decision making. Whether these efforts are elaborate publications or regular press releases and news stories, there is one crucial point to remember: the public has a well-developed sense for recognizing self-serving propaganda. Extensive media advertising has caused most citizens to become very skeptical of 'glowing reports'. Keep this in mind when publishing any information. It is important to stick to the facts, and to exclude editorial opinion, or at least separate your views from the rest of the text. Striving to portray the realistic situation, including the admission of past and present mistakes, will build public trust in your program. 'One-way' communication methods are rarely used alone, but are normally used in conjunction with information feedback, consultation or extended involvement methods.

Some public information techniques are:

- -news releases
- -news conferences
- -newsletters/pamphlets
- -viewing centres/audio visuals/public displays
- -technical papers

❑ Public Information Feedback

Public information feedback techniques are used to obtain information from the public. They include methods used to develop overviews of general public opinion, as well as techniques inviting the public to respond to a specific proposal or set of proposals.

Public information feedback techniques include:

- analysis of newspaper coverage
- -surveys of knowledge and opinion
- -community profiles/social pro files
- briefs and written submissions in response to position papers

❑ **Consultation**

Where issues call for considerable discussion between line managers and the public, some form of consultation is needed. A consultation method may be used as your principal method, or it may be used as part of an extended involvement program. Remember, however, whatever method is used will demand substantial commitment in organization, support, staff time, and use of the results.

Many of the public's interests in environmental issues and resource use are represented by organized environmental groups. Some organizations are unique to local communities, but most are part of provincial or national associations. There is, therefore, a good network of groups which have access to common information and resources, and are often concerned with your project.

As part of your overall approach to ongoing public involvement, you can keep the lines of communication with these groups open by:

❑ including them on a mailing list for department publications;

❑ holding meetings with organization executive members to air general concerns and trade information; and

❑ holding an annual meeting with organized groups to assess progress in your area, and to identify concerns.

Another good way to promote dialogue with the public is to meet with service clubs, unions, the Chamber of Commerce and similar organizations. By attending their meetings and requesting a place on the agenda, you get a chance to contact many people without having them give up another evening.

Consultation techniques for specific projects and policy issues include:

- working plan reviews
- public meetings
- workshops
- open houses

❑ **Extended Involvement and Joint Planning**

Extended involvement and joint planning techniques demand the most support from project managers. Therefore, they should be selected only where the issues are major, complex, or particularly controversial. Extended involvement techniques stretch over time periods and require the support of both public information and consultation techniques; thus they provide the most scope for adapting to local conditions. Joint

planning techniques result in shared decision making, in which the public is represented on decision making or problem solving bodies. As there is generally much dialogue between members of the public and project managers, extended involvement and joint planning methods result in a knowledgeable group of citizens who can assist in future issues, or give advice on an ongoing public involvement program.

Techniques include:

- advisory committees
- task groups
- joint planning teams

CHOOSING AN APPROACH

The selection of an approach to a public involvement program is a matter of judgment, although the decision should be made easier if the process outlined in Volume 2 has been followed. Depending on the program's objectives, a project manager may choose to limit the public involvement program to education or information feedback techniques, or may wish to utilize more participative approaches. Some situations invite the use of consultative approaches, while others demand extended involvement or joint planning approaches.

Table 1 provides some guidelines in selecting between consultation and extended involvement approaches, a choice which project managers can sometimes find difficult.

The seriousness and complexity of the situation affect the use of various consultation and extended involvement techniques, and the amount of effort and support required to make the program work.

Public involvement programs take time, cost money, and raise expectations. This is not bad, if a manager understands the need for a clear commitment to the program selected. In general, the more complex the method chosen, the greater must be the agency's commitment to support the process and to use the results. The public often come to a public involvement program jaded and suspicious that their views will have little real impact on decisions. Growth in public support, personal satisfaction with participation, and effectiveness of results depend on how the manager conveys his/her commitment to working with the public, and on heeding it's advice.

Table 1
Choosing a Public Involvement Approach

Considerations Which Suggest Consultative Approaches	Considerations Which Suggest Extended Involvement or Joint Planning Approaches
Issues have minor impact on the environment, or are mainly a matter of public preferences which can be accommodated by changes in design of plans.	Issues have serious implications for the environment; significant economic and/or social impacts, with trade-offs, are likely.
Narrow range of issues is involved.	Wide range of complex issues is involved.
A small number of people are interested in the situation, generally focussed on a special area of interest.	Many public and agency groups are concerned with the issues; concerns are shared by diverse advocates.
Issues are urgent and must be dealt with in a short period of time (weeks or two to three months).	Issues are important but there is time available for planning (six months to one or two years).
The public is concerned but is not demanding an extensive formal involvement program.	The public strongly desires a formal involvement program.
The agency has the capacity to support a modest program.	The agency has the capacity to support a complex program.

Commitment not only applies to the agency people 'on the firing line' but also to the senior officials to whom they report. A manager must check the limits of decision-making authority with superiors in advance, so they can provide backup when the going gets rough and the unexpected, but ever possible, occurs. As the degree of public involvement increases, so does the degree of commitment required on the part of the agency.

The remainder of the volume is structured as follows. Chapters 1 to 3 of Part 1 provide detailed information on some of the most commonly used techniques.

Chapter 1 Public Information Feedback Techniques: Polls and questionnaires; interviewing; social profiles; content analyses

Chapter 2 Public Consultation Techniques: Public Meetings, Open Houses and Workshops

Figure 1
Degrees of Public Involvement and Commitment

Degree of Involvement	Message to the Public
Public Information Release	You want them to know about it.
Public Education Program	You want them to understand and support your program.
Opinion Sampling	You care about what people think and conduct yourself accordingly.
Checking Plans for Acceptance	You are willing to alter plans and operations to accommodate their views.
Extended Advisory Involvement	You seriously expect to implement most of their advice.
Joint Planning and Decision-Making	You are fully committed to using the results in all but the most extenuating circumstances.

Chapter 3 Extended Involvement Techniques: Advisory Committees, Consensus Guidelines, and Chairing Extended Involvement Groups

Part 2 of this volume is a dictionary of virtually all public involvement techniques which are in current use. Since new techniques are developed from time to time, and others tend to be discontinued, the dictionary may not be exhaustive. For each technique, a brief description is provided, and its advantages and limitations noted.

As a General Rule, The Higher the Degree of Involvement . . .

The more staff time and energy is required.
The more money it costs to support the involvement process.
The more detailed and sophisticated resource information is requested by participants.
The greater is the expectation of participants that their contributions will be valued and used.
The greater visible commitment must be made by the professional to using the results, adhering to plans, keeping participants informed of progress, and explaining any deviations from participant recommendations or decisions.

Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....

Use several techniques in a program, rather than relying on just one.

Remember that as the degree of public involvement increases, so does the degree of commitment required on the part of the agency.

PART ONE - USING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER 1 INFORMATION FEEDBACK TECHNIQUES

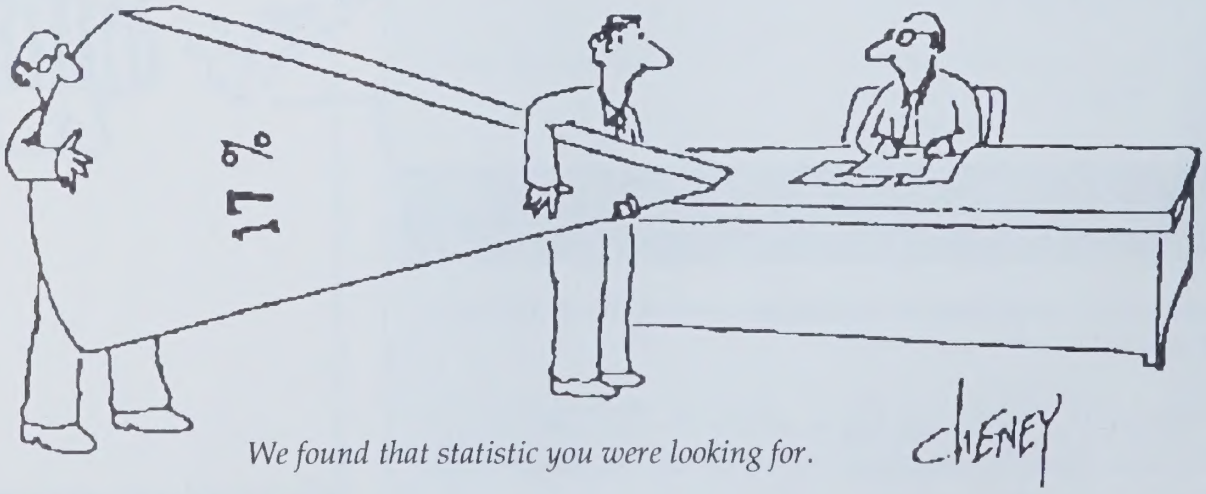
This chapter provides in-depth detail on the three most common public information feedback techniques: polls; and questionnaires, interviewing; social profiles.

USE OF POLLS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Polls and questionnaires are both effective means of assessing public opinion. Their use by federal agencies is, however, strictly regulated by Statistics Canada.

Nature of Polls and Questionnaires

Polls are a technique for measuring the mix of opinions held by the public. They are conducted by trained interviewers who ask each person interviewed exactly the same questions, and in the same order. These questions are pre-tested to be sure they are clear, unbiased, and elicit the information desired. The people interviewed will be part of a sample population chosen using rules accepted by professionals in the field as guaranteeing the



We found that statistic you were looking for.

"randomness" or lack of bias in the sample chosen. Statistical research has been conducted to establish standards for how many people must be interviewed from a total population to ensure reliability of the findings to certain levels of confidence, e.g., the figures are accurate to plus or minus five percent. The level of confidence can be increased by increasing the number of interviews conducted.

Polls differ from questionnaires in that the responses are tallied by the interviewer. Questionnaires are completed by the person responding, and are often more open-ended. Because they may provide more information, including information other than that anticipated by the questioner. However, polls – precisely because they are not open-ended – have greater statistical reliability.

Use of Polls and Questionnaires

Before any claims of statistical validity or reliability can be made for the results of a poll or questionnaire, the design of the "sample" – those people invited to complete the interviews or questionnaire – must meet rigorous standards to ensure that the sample is truly random. In addition the questions need to be pre-tested to ensure that they are not biased, and obtain the information they were designed to elicit. This means that the design of any interview protocol or questionnaire should be done by someone with professional expertise in questionnaire design. Amateurish questionnaires may produce charges of bias or invasion of privacy, and not result in information that is credible enough to be used. The very virtue of polls and questionnaires – their quantifiability – is also their weakness if they are badly done. Because results of polls and questionnaires are quantifiable, they give an aura of objectivity that no other technique can give. This can be very reassuring to a decision maker who must make a difficult decision in the face of strong opposition no matter which choice is made. But a poorly designed poll will be quoted as "fact" just as much as a well designed poll. For this reason, polls, and to a lesser extent questionnaires, should normally be conducted by people with extensive training in conducting them. This usually means, however, that external consultants must be used, so the costs of conducting polls are relatively high.

Advantages and Limitations

The primary advantage of polls and questionnaires is their ability to reach out beyond the organized groups to the "unorganized public". With most public involvement techniques it is possible to determine the range of views held by the public, but not the proportion of people who hold each view. If carefully designed, a poll or questionnaire will help determine the proportion of people holding the different views. If there is a concern, for example, that only a small vocal minority is being heard from, a questionnaire would tell to what extent the views being heard are held by the public at large. Polls and questionnaires also gather opinions from people who would be unwilling to speak out at a public meeting or other forum. A questionnaire could be administered by local people hired especially for this purpose, or by volunteers, resulting in further community interest in and "ownership" of the project.

There are, however, important limitations on the use of polls and questionnaires. Drafting the background planning report to a questionnaire and obtaining approval from Statistics Canada for the survey can be a time-consuming process.

Another limitation of polls and questionnaires is that both give equal weight to all respondents, even though this does not reflect political reality. A person who cares deeply about an issue is given the same weight as an uninterested individual, whatever their political clout. Knowledge about the mix of views in the general public does not necessarily tell the political balance of power in the community. Polls and questionnaires can be designed to solve this problem, though, by asking questions about the respondent's familiarity with the issue, and by showing differences in opinions among people who are very familiar with the issue, as distinct from those who are not.

Polls and questionnaires give a snapshot picture of public opinion at a given time. That opinion can change rapidly, particularly if the public starts out largely uninformed about the issue. A completely accurate picture of public sentiment at one point in time may not be at all accurate two months later.
The costs of analyzing large numbers of the responses to polls or questionnaires can also be high. It usually takes a staff member at least as long to analyze and record

each response as it took the citizen to provide the response in the first place. When dealing with several thousand responses, this can run into considerable staff time. Because of the costs involved, if it is not necessary to know the exact proportion of viewpoints in a community, but simply general information about public attitudes, it might be preferable to conduct a series of informal interviews or focus groups.

Despite the virtues of polls, they do not replace the political process. They do provide some indication, though, of how representative the people participating are of the public at large.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Advantages and Limitations

Informal interviews can be an effective part of public involvement programs. A series of 30-60 minutes interviews with representatives of all the key interests can provide a quick understanding of the issue, the dynamics between the interests, and the intensity of their interest in the issue. Several days of interviews can often produce an extremely large amount of information.

Informal interviews permit the exploration of a subject in some depth. They do not limit respondents to the choices that might be shown on a questionnaire. They also enable exploring preferences, which helps to understand the motivations and intensity of feeling which underlie these opinions. Interviews also permit exploration of topics other than those which are predetermined to be important, and in this way can be helpful in identifying new issues or concerns that had not previously been considered. Interviews help build trust and credibility as well as an information base.

The inherent problem with interviews, though, is that they are time-consuming, and it is possible to interview only a limited number of people. A 30-45 minute interview may take a total of 2-3 hours of staff time to set up the interview appointment, plan the interview, drive to the interview, conduct it, work up one's notes into a summary report, and transcribe the interviews for the files. This usually means that it is normally possible to interview only a limited number of people. This can be perfectly appropriate if the information needed is the opinions of the organized interests, or community leaders. But it is not possible to know for sure either

that the people talked to are representative of all the interests in the community or what the proportion of viewpoints is in the larger community.

A less time consuming and costly alternative to face-to-face interviews is interviewing by telephone. This should be used when in-depth interviews are not required.

Interviews also lack visibility, since only the people interviewed know what occurred in them. This means that the public (and the decision makers) have to take it on faith that the interviewers have accurately reflected the information received in the interview.

The emphasis in informal interviewing is on qualitative, not quantitative, information. There are two major reasons why it is not appropriate to claim any quantitative validity for the information received through informal interviews: "sampling bias" and "interviewer effect". "Sampling bias" simply means that by targeting the groups and individuals to be interviewed, rather than making a random selection, a "bias" has been introduced into the sample. It may be a very useful bias – a bias towards the people who have the kind of information needed – but it precludes making any quantitative statements about what the public feels since it may be an unrepresentative sample of the public.

"Interviewer effect" refers to the fact that when questions are asked in different ways, or by different people, different information is elicited. As a result, the way a question is asked one time may produce different information than apparently the same question asked a different way another time. The response that is given to one staff member may be different than to the same question asked by another staff member. This is why the wording of questions is so carefully designed and pretested as part of conducting a poll or survey. Even if the same topics are covered in the course of a series of informal interviews, the fact that the wording is a little different each time and the context in which the topic comes up is different, produces an interviewer effect that removes any possibility of claiming quantitative validity.

Guidelines on Conducting Interviews

Clarifying the Purpose: The first, rather obvious, step in conducting interviews is to clarify exactly what is to be learned from

the interviews. When the first call is made to set up an appointment the question that will be asked is, "What is the purpose of the interview?" Not only is a clear succinct answer needed to get people to agree to be interviewed, but clarity about the purpose of the interview is also necessary in order to know who it is that needs to be interviewed. Although interviews do permit unstructured discussion, they should not be disorganized "fishing expeditions", or people will be offended.

Selecting the People to be Interviewed: Even when no pretense is made of taking a scientific sample, the credibility of a public involvement program requires that an effort be made to include all major points of view. Major groups which have been left out will then assume the assessment is biased. If there are 10 environmental groups it is not necessary to interview all 10. However, representatives of enough groups should be interviewed to be sure that the differences among them, as well as their political dynamics, are understood.

Some groups may act as an umbrella for others. It is sometimes a good idea to phone those you don't intend to interview and ask, " If I visit with (an organization) to discuss this issue, do you think I will cover most of the concerns your organization has on this issue?" If not, you can respond to any remaining points then on the phone. This is a cost-effective use of the interest group leaders' time as well as the agency's. The interest groups' usually appreciate it. As well, the informal network that exists among non-governmental organizations will enable you to learn of other organizations that should be interviewed. It will also help communicate the results of your interview rapidly.

Setting up Interviews: It is normal practice to arrange an appointment in advance for the interview. Fortunately there is a subtle flattery involved in asking someone for an interview – the implication is that their views are very important or they are very wise – so most people will willingly set up an interview. They will, however, want to know: 1) the purpose of the interview, 2) how the information will be used (including its confidentiality), 3) who or what kinds of people are being interviewed, and 4) how long the interview will take.

If possible, it is best if the person who will conduct the interview sets up the appointment, since this gives a

chance to establish some initial rapport. But since this is a time-consuming process it is often done by someone else. If this is the case be sure that the person setting up the interviews is thoroughly acquainted with the purposes and uses of the interview indicated above. Also be sure that the person setting up interview appointments allows time for: 1) travelling from interview to interview, and 2) about 30 minutes after each interview to fill in notes while the interview is fresh.

If the appointment has been set up several days or more in advance by someone other than the interviewer, the interviewer may want to call the day before to confirm the interview. This reassures both the interviewer and the person being interviewed that their time will not be wasted, and may begin to build rapport.

Ideally, the interviewee should be met "on his or her ground", at a place and time determined by them - for example, at the citizen group's office.

Length of an Interview: Normally, leaders of active groups, interest, or agencies are willing to give 30-60 minutes to an interview. Anything longer than 60 minutes will depend on how interested the person being interviewed is in the topic. Anything shorter than thirty minutes will be so rushed – particularly since some time is invariably lost getting in and out of their offices or homes – that many of the benefits of informal interviews will be lost. Some experienced interviewers have found, though, that even if an individual will only schedule for a short time, if they are interested in the topic that time will usually be permitted to expand. But if a limited interview time has been scheduled, and the person being interviewed is clearly restive, do not insult them by just taking the time whether they are comfortable with it or not.

Asking Questions: An effective way of conducting interviews is to use an informal structured approach, in which the question areas are identified beforehand and used as a guide in conducting the interview, although the order in which questions are asked may change. It is especially important to have a structured format if more than one interviewer is used, in order to have some degree of comparability.

When several interviewers are used, there should be frequent meetings so that interviewers can compare notes on issues, interview structure, questions, and interview techniques. Often

interviewers change their approach over time and it is important to maintain consistency.

There are two general rules to observe in how questions are posed. These are:

Don't ask leading questions. When a question is asked such as "Don't you think that Project X is needed?" it's clear that the answer the questioner wants is "yes". The question is structured in such a way that it "leads" to the desired answer. Research shows that people who do not have strong opinions are likely to allow themselves to be led. The desired answer will be obtained, but it will be worthless as a predictor of people's position on the issue. People who already have a strong opinion are likely to be insulted by leading questions, and will draw the conclusion that the interviews are biased.

Questions should be open-ended. If the question asked is, "Do you believe Project X is needed?" the answer is likely to be "yes" or "no". Obviously such an answer is only minimally helpful when in-depth information is needed about what kinds of problems are occurring, or how important they are. As a result it is better to ask open-ended questions – questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no answer. Examples of open-ended questions are "What do you think future requirements will be?" or "What do you think are the pros and cons of Project X?" or "How can issue Y best be resolved?" Such questions encourage more complete answers, and also permit the person being interviewed to address topics or raise issues important to them. Follow up on some points with "What leads you to say this?" (Phrasing it this way gets better results than "Why?")

Note Taking: It is important in conducting an interview to establish a comfortable relationship with the person being interviewed. This is difficult to do if poring over notes, maintaining little or no eye contact, and struggling to keep up with the individual. Most experienced interviewers use either of two strategies:

Brief Notes/Prompt Review. One technique frequently employed by experienced note takers is to keep brief notes of the interviews, stressing only the most significant points, and to go to a quiet place immediately after each interview and fill in the notes from memory. The original notes serve as reminders of other notes which need to be written down. Time for this "de-

briefing" must therefore be built into the interview schedule.

Brief Notes/Tape Recorder. Some interviewers prefer to take brief notes, but use a tape recorder as a back-up to fill in the notes later. This is particularly good if there is premium on having the person's exact words – as there would be for a journalist. Some people may feel intimidated by a tape recorder, or may be more cautious with their comments for fear the tape will get into someone else's hands. On the whole though, most people seem to be comfortable with a tape recorder, and in fact, appreciate it's accuracy. However, transcribing from a tape recorder is a very time-consuming process.

Confidentiality: In return for getting candid information, the interviewer must usually make a commitment about the confidentiality of the information. Normally the commitment would be that only people within the agency who are working directly on the project or study will have access to the summaries from individual interviews. If there is a need – and there usually is in public involvement programs – for an overall summary of the interviews which will be distributed to a larger audience, then the report must be written in ways that protect the identity of individuals who provided sensitive information. Anytime the information is going to be made available to people other than the interviewer, the interviewer has a responsibility to inform the person of this at the beginning of the interview.

Sharing Information: Almost invariably as an interview ends the person being interviewed will ask questions like "How did Group Z feel about this?" or "What have other people you've interviewed felt about ...?" These questions immediately raise all the problems for the interviewer of confidentiality, leading, or bias. Yet there is a simple reciprocity to these questions which is hard to ignore: this person has just given some information and is now asking for some in return. Obviously this is a judgment call, but within the limits of confidentiality most interviewers do respond with some general statement similar to those which would be contained in the summary of the interviews which will be made public. The important thing is to be prepared for the possibility of such questions, so that confidentiality isn't inadvertently violated if the interviewer is taken by surprise.

COMMUNITY PROFILES

The community or social profile is a comprehensive summary of the key characteristics of the people of a community or study area. Its purpose is to orient planners, engineers and administrators to the social and cultural realities which they need to understand and take into account if a project, program or policy is to be accepted. It can also be applied to a corporation or government agency by a citizen group.

Rationale

In the past, new policies and projects have often generated hostile public reactions because the proponents failed to understand and respond to the values, goals, concerns and views of the people affected. The community profile provides the core of a social data base needed to balance the technical information available to planners and decision makers with an appreciation of the humanistic and political considerations involved.

For these key people to make sensitive decisions, they need a character sketch of the community so they can relate their responsibilities and proposals to it. From the community profile, they should grasp how and why this community is different from others, and how it is likely to respond to a new activity just as a personal profile of an individual enables a manager to judge how this person might respond to a new assignment.

Data Collection

First, review non-reactive sources of information, many of which will often be available outside the community eg. back issues of the weekly press; aerial photographs, preferably 10 years apart; local histories in the regional library; university theses and government reports on the community. Make a content analysis of this material, identifying information under key headings such as: community issues; active organizations; leaders; attitudes towards growth; knowledge of and attitude to the client and/or the proposal.

Second, identify any people knowledgeable about the community who live beyond it eg. civil servants now in a provincial or regional centre who presently service the community or who used to live in it. Interview some of these people by telephone or face to face in an informal way; have a list of issues and questions you want to

COMMUNITY PROFILES

explore, but allow the conversation to be flexible rather than using a structured questionnaire.

Next, visit the community and initially immerse yourself in it, observing its people and how they spend their time and effort. Experience a day in the life of the community as unobtrusively as possible and reflect on how its residents view their world.

Now start to visit some key people and interview them informally. A conversation about the history of the community provides a comfortable starting point and usually yields many insights into leadership, issues, factions, etc. Through it you will often be introduced to the elders of the community.

Look for people who have had long residence in the community, much contact with its residents and are sufficiently secure in their positions that they can talk freely. Some of these are the public health nurse, leaders of voluntary associations, some business people, bank managers, clergy, the staff of service agencies, the school principal (and the janitor). Interview local government officials and elected representatives later so you will be better able to interpret their positions and discuss them in depth.

In talking with these people, explore subjects until you obtain a consistent position from at least three sources. If a certain organization appears to be a key factor in community decision making according (a) to your analysis of the local weekly, (b) according to a provincial civil servant located in the capital but knowledgeable through his work in the community, and is (c) corroborated by two of these conversations in the community, count that as a fact established. You do not need to raise it in subsequent interviews, but can focus them on other subjects which are still unclear. This approach employs the navigator's technique of "triangulation" to establish facts with reasonable accuracy.

In some cases, the range of people interviewed is restricted by the fact that clients do not want their interest in the community to become public knowledge. However, there are usually some key people from whom valid information can be obtained and who are accustomed to working under these constraints (eg. bank managers, clergy, provincial or federal civil servants, etc.).

The foregoing approach to data collection is always modified by the size and unique circumstances of

each community.

Level of Effort

A trained and experienced social researcher (typically with the equivalent of a master's degree in applied social science) usually requires about ten days to complete a social profile. This usually breaks down into 1-1.5 days of pre-entry work, 5-6 days in the community and the remainder to write the 30-40 page report. This has proven workable with small rural communities, regional municipalities and cities up to the size of Calgary and Edmonton.

The social profile is designed to provide a charcoal sketch of the main features of the people of the area and how they view and manage their world. Subsequently, it can readily be updated and carried out in greater depth, as may be needed, for example, as part of a Social Impact Assessment. However, it is not a substitute for a standard sociological study, using a random sample of the population; should this methodology be required, a previously prepared social profile can be very helpful in designing the questionnaire.

The Report

The writing style must be simple and direct so that a busy manager or engineer can grasp the main points quickly and easily. Start with a map; eliminate jargon; omit heavy footnoting; place any large tables in an appendix, but first question if they are necessary. A photograph or two is often a more informative use of space.

The introduction to the report should indicate the sources of data, the limitations on data collection, the level of effort invested and a request for comments and suggestions.

Following the usual table of contents, executive summary and map, the remaining chapters can follow the headings outlined below.

In addition to a written report, some organizations which have to orient a number of project staff to the community will find it worthwhile to develop an audio-visual presentation of the social profile. This can be a 10 minutes video production or a simple one-projector with a pulsed soundtrack; portable equipment can provide instant orientation to visitors and new employees.

Pages 23-26 are excerpted with permission from Conner, Desmond M., "Social Profile Workshop" in Constructive Citizen Participation: A Resource Book, Development Press, Victoria, B.C., Revised edition, 1988, pp. II 1-4.

Suggested Report Contents

1. Local History

- identify early settlement, key events and past leaders
- what are the trends in land use?
- note population trends eg. age-sex distribution; migration; ethnic origin; occupations; education (see Census or planning studies).
- how does the history of the community help to explain its present position and character?

2. Industries and Occupations

- what are the main employers, markets, skills?
- how do these affect the community's behavior?

3. Development Issues

- what issues arose in past five years; who got involved; what happened; how was each issue resolved?
- what are current issues and what, if anything, is being done about them eg. planning studies etc.?
- identify attitudes to growth.
- what are the implications of the above for the agency and/or project?

4. Organizations and Leadership

- list the principal groups, their activities and officers, their role in the community.
- identify and give a brief description of community leaders and influentials eg. who have followers and are respect- ed for their opinions?
- what does this imply for the proponent and its plans?

5. Communication Channels

- outline the formal media eg. geographic coverage, capacity and credibility of each; circulation/audience of each.
- describe the informal networks - key nodes on grapevines; strategic listening posts in the community.
- what relevance have these channels for the agency and/or project?

6. Knowledge of and Attitudes to Client/ Industry/project

- what valid information, myths and areas of ignorance are evident in key people and groups?
- how does the above affect information and education requirements for the proposed activities?

7. Publics Affected

- summarize the key characteristics of each public eg. language; education; media and grapevines appropriate; organizations and leaders relevant etc.
- what implications has this for the formation of a Citizen's Advisory Committee and other techniques?

8. Observations and Conclusions

- provide a succinct outline of how the characteristics of the community appear to affect the agency and/or project and their implications for a public participation program.

ANALYZING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DATA (CONTENT ANALYSIS)

Once a public involvement program has been underway, extensive information about the views of the public, interest groups and other levels of government begins to accumulate.

Two major questions arise:

❑ How does one analyze and use all "public's" comments on the issue(s)?

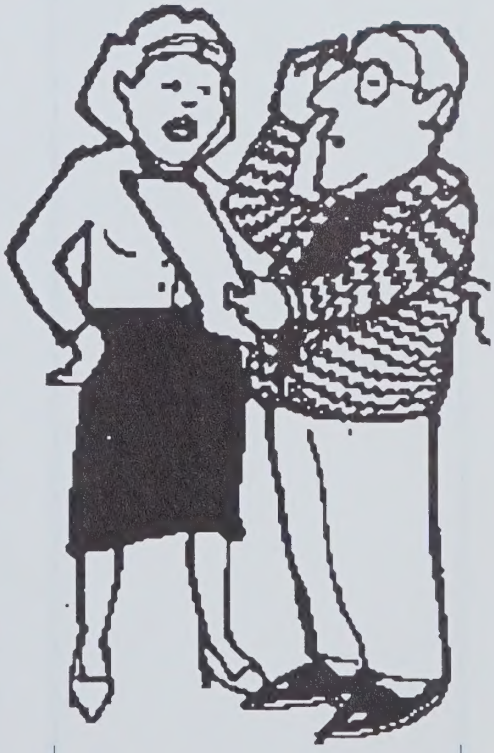
❑ How does one organize and determine the relative importance of the data for the decision-makers who will ultimately respond?

Unfortunately, these two questions frequently are overlooked in the frenzy to complete the public involvement program and document it for the decision makers. This section, therefore, focuses on these two topics.

Analyzing Public Comment

In the early days of public involvement programs there was a tendency to sort public comment into two categories: for the proposed action and against the proposed action. The summary of several public meetings and several hundred letters might show that 427 supported the project and 373 opposed it. Since the potential number of people affected would be in the hundreds of thousands or even millions, the only conclusion to be drawn from this summary was that the proposed action was controversial - something which was already known.

Obviously, this kind of summary was unfair both to the public and to management trying to interpret what the public said. A four-page argument for a position and a one-sentence postcard were given equal weight. Man-



agement couldn't tell why people supported or opposed the action, the differences in opinion among various kinds of groups, or points of agreement among them. The choice for management was either to make decisions based on limited information, or laboriously wade through transcripts and hundreds of letters.

In recent years more sophisticated tools have been developed which better address the public's comments and provide important information for the decision-maker. In part these techniques have been developed to handle the massive amount of information generated by public involvement programs. Public involvement programs conducted by other agencies have, in a few cases, generated as many as 20,000 comments or letters to analyze. Since this made it impossible for management to be personally involved in reading the comments or letters, techniques had to be developed which provided management with adequate understanding of the nature of the public's comments.

The Difference Between Analysis and Evaluation

The purpose of an analysis is to summarize and display public comment in such a way that maximum information is available to decision-makers (and to the public) about what was said. To the extent possible, analysis should display public comment without interjecting interpretation or judgment.

Evaluation of public comment takes place after analysis and includes judgment and weighting, or assigning relative value. This is the task of the decision-maker, who may have to evaluate the relative importance, for example, of 315 handwritten letters versus 400 names on a petition. The decision-maker may also have to weight the importance of various user groups with the concerns of environmental groups living throughout the region. Obviously evaluation is an essential element of decision making, and analysis is the process of getting the information ready so that evaluation can occur.

Analytic Techniques

The most useful analytic techniques are based on content analysis. This is a research tool used in sociology, journalism, and political science to analyze the actual content (arguments, facts, logic) contained in newspaper articles, letters, and so forth. Content analysis has been used, for example, to conduct research comparing the relative fre-

quency of certain topics in letters to the editor, as a means of identifying public priorities. The best-selling book, Megatrends, based its predictions of future trends on the increasing frequency with which certain topics were appearing in national media.

Two variations of content analysis that have been most useful in analyzing public comment are Content Summary Analysis and Codinvolve. For the purposes of this document, a brief description of Content Summary Analysis will be provided.

Content Summary Analysis is designed to capture the actual language of the public in describing its reasons for supporting or opposing a proposed action; it gives the decision-maker a "feel" for the intensity of the language used or how well thought out the arguments are. Content Summary Analysis is simple to use if the number of comments if relatively small. It becomes more complex if the number of comments is very large.

The steps in Content Summary Analysis are as follows:

1. Code responses for identification, origin, and affiliation. Each letter or comment received is assigned an identification code telling when and how the comment was received, and any information about the affiliation of the person making the comment. The identification code is important because it provides a means of answering questions about how people of different affiliation or living in different geographical areas feel about the issue, eg., how do people from outside the project area feel about the project compared to those living in the area? Does one user group feel differently from other user groups? Do taxpayers from one area of the region feel the same as those from the other parts of the region?

2. Make multiple copies. This step applies when comments are going to be physically stored on paper. If information is stored on a computer this step is unnecessary.

3. Select file codes. The next step is to identify the basic files or categories which will be needed. These can range from very simple to very sophisticated. Only two files might be needed - one for comments supporting the action and one for comments opposing the action. However, after reviewing the comments it may be observable that there are basically five reasons that people oppose the action

and three reasons that they support it. In this case it would be useful to establish 10 files (six for opposing comments, including one for people who oppose it but do not give a reason, and four for supporting comments, including one file for people who support it without giving a reason). Each file or category is assigned a code number.

4. Conduct a first analysis. Read the entire comment or letter for its overall meaning. Then reread the comment, underlining all portions in which the content is related to the categories defined.

5. Code the comments. Go back through the comment or letter again assigning the appropriate code to each underlined comment. This coding process should include both the file code and the identification number. The identification number is noted for two reasons: it leads the decision-maker back to the entire letter if the comment is of particular interest, and it allows the comments in that file to be analyzed by origin or affiliation.

6. Conduct a second analysis. To ensure that the comment or letter has been analyzed objectively, it is recommended that the coded comment be reviewed by a second analyst. Any differences in opinion on how the comment should be coded can be resolved by discussion between the two analysts.

7. Store a complete copy of the marked-up comment or letter. This copy should be kept in a master file as documentation so that the public or management can always be shown how the analysis was done.

8. Store the coded comments in the appropriate files. If storing pieces of paper, a marked-up copy will need to be cut up and the slips containing the appropriately coded comments placed in the appropriate files. With computer storage, a program is needed to send portions of the total comment or letter to designated categories.

9. Prepare a report. When working with pieces of paper, a report can be prepared by simply pasting-up all the comments by category. Obviously this paste-up procedure limits the usefulness of Content Summary Analysis for large quantities of comments. Also, cross-comparisons by origin and affiliation can become cumbersome. A computer can simply print out all the comments stored in particular categories, and cross-comparisons are easy to make. Nevertheless if the number of comments is

large, the report will be very thick.

Comments on Statistical Reports

It is often a good idea to accompany statistical displays with a narrative summary, for example: "a majority (61 percent) of interest group indicate support of the proposed action for these three reasons..." Many people, including not only the public but many decision-makers as well, are intimidated by statistical analyses and will understand the material in narrative form.

It is essential, however, that the narrative simply summarize the analysis rather than evaluate the comment. Content Summary Analysis strictly an analytical technique. Using it for evaluation will undermine its credibility.

Analyzing Public Comment for Underlying Values

Content Summary Analysis (and Codinvolve) concentrate on the content (arguments, facts, logic) of the comment or letter. Another important dimension of public comment is the values or underlying political philosophies expressed in the comment. Values are the yardsticks by which we judge things to be right or wrong, moral or immoral, fair or unfair, and so forth. While the content of people's views on a topic often changes in response to new information or dialogue with other groups, basic values positions are relatively permanent. As a result values are often a better long-term predictor of people's eventual positions than content.

The difficulty with analyzing values is that they are often implied rather than stated explicitly. This makes it more difficult to do an objective job of analysis, because the analyst must surmise the values, rather than dealing with explicit material. In addition, some letters will clearly contain only content, so it is impossible to record them in a values analysis. This can lead to charges of ignoring some letters or comments. As a result, the results of any values analysis can usually be reported only in qualitative terms and not quantitatively.

There are several indicators of implied values. These are:

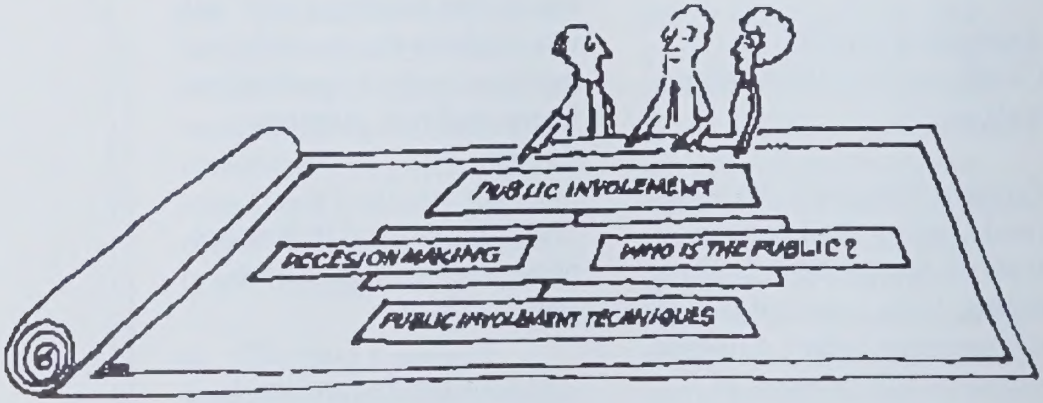
- ❑ Values-laden language: "corporate rip-offs", "energy pigs", and so forth.
- ❑ Predicting dire consequences: "A working man won't be able to afford electricity"

❑ Characterizations of opponents: "hippie freaks", "yes men", or "rip-off artists".

❑ Quoting venerable sources: Quotes from the Bible, the Meech Lake Accord, leading thinkers or writers.

By looking for these indicators an analyst will often be able to come up with a reasonable estimate of people's values and beliefs based on a spoken or written comment. One of the best checks to ensure objectivity is to undertake a second analysis without knowledge of the results of the first. Any differences in interpretation would be worked out by discussion between the analysts.

Values comments could also be coded in the same way as content, with values categories set up in just the same way as content categories. Given the limitations of values analysis mentioned above, it would be more appropriate to store actual comments from the public in each category rather than to tally the number of responses in each category. This way management could be given the "flavor" of the values expressed, without any misleading claims to a statistically valid analysis.



CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC CONSULTATION TECHNIQUES

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings appear to be the simplest, most direct way of gaining contact with the public. All that seems needed is to hire a hall, send invitations, draw up an agenda, and show up. In reality, the public meeting is one of the most complex, unpredictable, and demanding situations, for these reasons:

❑ You only have one short chance to do things right. A mistake or false impression may not be changed easily, and can be made worse by a few angry people.

❑ Public meetings can be taken over by interest groups or individuals who want to air a favorite theme at length.

❑ Many people are afraid to speak in front of large groups. They may have important and positive things to say but will not say them at a meeting.

❑ Regardless of why the meeting was called, people may use it to talk about other things which are beyond your scope. It is hard to put aside issues if people are concerned about them.

❑ A lot may be going on in a community which affects how people react to your meeting announcement, your agenda items, your way of putting things, your timing of events, or your sense of what is important. People expect the person who called the meeting to know the local area and will be angry if they sense that you feel local issues are unimportant.

❑ Community leaders will feel that important issues may be raised at the meeting. They may worry about your impact on local government plans or political objectives.

❑ It is hard to know how many people will come, and therefore the facilities and services required.

All these problems can be lessened with careful research and preparation beforehand. Budget sufficient time and energy to do this.

Public Meeting Formats

There are numerous alternative formats for public meetings, depending on the purpose of the meeting, the size of the audience expected, and the level of interaction needed between participants. Among the major formats are:

- Briefing/Question and Answer
- Town Meeting
- Panel/Round Table
- Large Group/Small Group format

These meeting formats are discussed in Part 2, the "Dictionary of Techniques".

Know the Meeting Purpose

Selection of a format will depend upon what is to be accomplished with the meeting. By having a public meeting, you show openness and willingness to have the business done where it can be seen by everyone. While there are other ways of obtaining widespread consultation with the public, no forum is more important than the public meeting for giving everyone a chance to hear others' views and plans, and to get immediate clarification from each other. This aspect of exposure is fundamental to understanding the organization and conduct of public meetings.

Some of the reasons for public meetings are:

- to provide a forum to air concerns;
- to communicate plans, proposals, or decisions, along with background reasons, and to gather reactions;
- to seek views, preferences, or ideas;
- to give all parties a chance to hear from each other first hand;
- to present problems needing consideration by the community;
- to seek general agreement on ways of dealing with issues; and
- to share information.

It is common to expect too much from a public meeting. You might have too many agenda items to cover anything in depth, or you might be asking people to make complex analyses or decisions on the spot. The public meeting is useful for sharing information, but is not a good decision making arena. Except in very simple situations, the public meeting cannot qualify as a full public involvement program because it does not provide the extended think-

ing time necessary to deal with complex problems. Public meetings should rarely be used for long speeches from the sponsor. Such speeches lead to audience frustration, unless there are chances to ask questions or discuss issues.

Other techniques can also perform the same functions as a traditional a public meeting, with more "light" and less "heat". Be careful in selecting which technique to use.

Know the Audience

The other major factor in selecting a meeting format concerns the audience – its size, intensity of interest in the issue, familiarity with various types of meetings, and perceptions of the agency's credibility.

Audience Size: If an audience is very large, it becomes cumbersome to utilize small group processes. If the audience is broken up into small groups, for example, the logistics of providing flip charts, meeting rooms, etc. for all the small groups becomes very complex.

Intensity of Interest in the Issue: People who are very interested in a topic will probably be willing to utilize a structured process or other meeting format that encourages participation. If people are only moderately interested in the topic, a more passive format may be appropriate.

Familiarity with Meeting Formats: If leaders of the interests have participated in meetings where small group processes were used successfully, they will be more comfortable in using this kind of format again. Otherwise there may be discomfort with unorthodox meeting formats.

Agency Credibility: Whenever a meeting format is used that is substantially different from those familiar to the audience, agency credibility is on the line until it is demonstrated that this new format will be productive. In locations where the agency has substantial credibility, this may be no problem. Where the agency's credibility is already suspect, there may be resistance to an untraditional meeting format, even though it could be productive. In particular, an audience that is antagonistic to the proposed action or to the agency may see efforts to break into small groups as a "divide and conquer" tactic.

Seating Arrangements

Seating arrangements are a direct reflection of the type of meeting to be held and the relationship among participants. If agency staff are positioned at the front of the room, with the audience in rows, this seating arrangement establishes a relationship in which all participants talk to the meeting leaders at the front of the room, rather than to each other. This is appropriate for information giving, but not for interaction among participants. The potential for interaction is increased somewhat if the seating is semicircular, rather than in rows. The semicircular arrangement means there is some eye contact with others in the audience, which encourages interaction.

The ideal arrangement for interaction or consensus forming/negotiation is a circular arrangement, although this is sometimes limited by rectangular tables. In these cases the closest approximation to a circle is desirable. Not only does a circular arrangement establish eye contact between all participants, but it also removes any "head of the table," so everyone is equal in status. One approximation is the "hollow square of tables": 3 rows of chairs around a 15 ft. square will accommodate 100 people; sit four team members one on each side and citizens beside them to create an immediate conversational environment.

A typical banquet seating arrangement is a natural seating arrangement for a large group/small group meeting. People can turn to hear the opening presentation, then turn back to the people at their tables as the group with whom they will communicate. This means that the assignment to tables must create a random mix of people at each table, so that groups have a mix of opinions.

If the meeting is being held in a cafeteria, gymnasium or other large multipurpose room, it is possible to have two meeting set-ups: half the room is devoted to chairs in rows for the large group portion of the meeting, and the other half of the room is set around small tables for the small group discussion.

Time and Place of Meetings

Meetings should be held at a time and place convenient to the public, with the convenience of staff a secondary consideration. Usually this means that meetings will be held in the evenings, although meetings to be attended primarily by repre-

sentatives of governmental entities or organized groups may be more convenient during the day.

One of the first considerations in selecting a meeting place is whether the facility can accommodate the desired meeting format and seating arrangement. It may also be better to have the meeting away from agency facilities, on "neutral" ground.

Other factors to consider in selecting a meeting place include:

-Location of the facility (central or outlying).
-Public transportation access.
-Space for parking.
-Safety of the area.
-Access for handicapped.

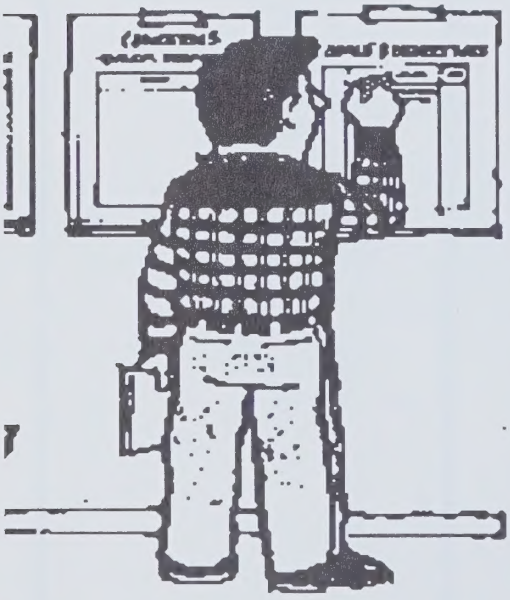
Preparation Checklist

-Conduct research phase.
-Check with local leaders and other potential participants to get a good understanding of local context and estimate of interest, explain what will be required from them.
-Prepare agenda and review it with other participants.
-Select location, time, and date.
-Publicize the meeting (press releases; newspaper notices; advertising; feature stories in the press; community organizations advertising and/or sponsoring the meetings)
-Prepare a background statement for the media so they have accurate information prior to the meeting.
-Advertise the meeting at least two to three weeks before, on the day before and on the day of the meeting.
-Ensure proper arrangements for seating, public address system, refreshments, access to the hall, projection screens, table for slide projector, displays, wall maps and charts, and the printing of agendas and other handouts.

If using visual aids, be sure they are big enough and clear enough for the room size. *Remember, simplicity is the key in any graphics.* You can always talk around anything related to the graphics, however, it is really easy to turn off an audience totally if they can't see or understand your graphic presentation.

General Rules for Leading Meetings

The manner in which meetings are led is a major factor in their effectiveness. An ineffective leader can cause the public to believe that the meeting was poorly run and a waste of time, while an autocratic leader can cre-



ate resentment and antagonism towards the agency.

An effective leader is one who is flexible enough to change formalistic meeting rules when appropriate, accepts comments from audience even though they may be emotionally laden, and conveys enthusiasm, sincerity and commitment for the public involvement process.

In many agencies the tradition has been that the highest ranking official of the agency leads the meeting. The advantage of this is that the public likes to know that its comments are being heard by someone high up in the agency. In addition, many top executives have good presence in front of an audience. The disadvantage is that it is harder for a top official to appear neutral. He or she may instead – under pressure – make commitments that should not be made. Also, antagonistic groups are more likely to try to use an attack against a high ranking official as a way of undermining the agency. One alternative is to have the highest ranking official open the meeting, say a few words of welcome, then turn the meeting over to a chairman. This makes it very clear that top management is as the meeting to hear the public's comments, but that the chairman's role is to establish and maintain a structure that works in everybody's interests, and is not just a role bestowed by virtue of rank. If top management's meeting leadership skills are very high, though, these skills may compensate for the risks run by having the top manager up in front of the meeting.

There are several basic principles to effective meeting leadership:

The participants "own" the meeting. The fundamental premise of effective meeting leadership is that of democracy itself: all power derives from the consent of the governed. Put another way: people accept meeting leadership because it is in their interest to do so. To accomplish anything in a meeting there must be some structure. Limits need to be set on topics, procedures must be established for recognition of speakers, and so forth. As long as the leader provides this structure in a manner that the participants consider equitable and reasonable, it is in their interest to cooperate. If challenged, the leader will usually be supported by the rest of the audience. However, if the structure is not considered equitable or reasonable, the leader's power is diminished and is subject to challenge.

Leading the process, not the content. The meeting leader should concentrate on providing an equitable meeting process and avoid assuming the role of an advocate or participant by commenting on the content of the meeting. If the agency needs someone to be the "expert" on the topic being discussed, this should be someone other than the meeting leader.

Avoid power symbols. Large numbers of experts, thousands of dollars of displays, or costly maps and graphics all communicate that the agency and the people leading the meeting are more important than the public. This can breed resentment and antagonism.

Guidelines for Conducting Large Meetings

A number of factors influence the effectiveness of large meetings:

Format: One of the first considerations in setting up a large meeting is the format of the meeting. Normally – except where legally required – the formalistic procedures of a public hearing should be avoided. The more formalistic the procedures are, the more people either feel intimidated by the procedures and will not speak, or feel resentful at having to "play the game by the agency's rules".

Just because a meeting begins with a large audience does not mean that it has to stay that way. Depending on the purpose of the meeting, it may be possible to break a large audience down into small work groups which either present brief verbal summaries at the end of the meeting, or hand in written reports. This approach can be effective if the purpose of the meeting is to collect information from the public, such as problem identification. If the topic of the meeting is very controversial, though, people may resist being broken up into small groups, claiming this is an effort to "divide and conquer". Under these circumstances people may want to hear how everybody feels, and efforts to use sophisticated meeting designs may be seen as an effort to manipulate the public.

If working groups are used, these general rules apply:

-the sub-group should have a prepared agenda;
-the sub-group should have a facilitator andminute recorder who know the task of the group;
-the sub-groups must report their results to the main meeting, so the underlying principle of exposure is not violated; and

-if a major job is expected of the sub-group, you should be running a workshop rather than holding a public meeting.

If a meeting is extremely controversial, it may be appropriate to meet with leaders of the various interests several weeks in advance to discuss the meeting format. If the key actors have been consulted regarding the meeting format, it is harder for groups to claim later that they have been abused.

Ground Rules: When going into a large meeting where strong antagonism is anticipated, there will be a need to set ground rules for participation. Examples are: time limits on speakers, the order in which speakers will be taken, limits on the topics to be discussed, etc. In a large meeting a ground rule such as a five minute time limit may be necessary to guarantee everybody a chance to speak; but such a time limit may be challenged by an organized group in an effort to win advantage for their position. The chairman of the meeting should explain the ground rules to the meeting participants and then give the reasons for using them. If it is possible, the chairman should meet with interest group leaders.

Increasing Participation: one of the disadvantages of large public meetings is that only a limited number of the public attending the meeting actually speak. The result is that the feelings of a number of attendees are never known. This problem can be minimized by providing a response form or hand-in workbook to everybody who attends a meeting, inviting their written comments. While not everybody will hand in a written comment, a significant percentage will, increasing confidence that the feelings and concerns of the total audience have been identified, not just those who speak.

Rules of Thumb for Public Meetings

-Plan the meeting to last no more than two-and-a-half to three hours

-Hand out a printed agenda at the meeting

-Introduce the person taking minutes, the government people, and the local leaders

-Arrange chairs so the chairperson can see everyone, but do not elevate the head table (if there is one)

-Use floor microphones for larger meetings so everyone can hear questions from participants, as well as answers from the chair

-Allow time to let participants speak without being cut off.

CHAIRING A PUBLIC MEETING

Conducting a public meeting is an art. It requires a balance of openness to meeting the needs of participants, as well as firmness in pursuing the agreed- upon agenda. If there is strong public concern over issues, the chair-person may be held in suspicion or openly challenged. A proposal to waive the prepared agenda may be made, or a speech by one person may alter the climate and make your aims untenable. Here are some guidelines for preparing to chair a meeting:

-Always check out the agenda with participants before starting (remain open to altering the agenda).

-Limit speakers only when necessary to give fair time to others (present time limits with this proviso).

-Never put down or ridicule a speaker who has annoyed or challenged you (courtesy is always necessary, especially when limiting a speaker or ruling someone out of order).

-When soliciting comments, look around the hall systematically and leave enough time for hesitant people to come forward before moving on.

-Treat all points of view as valid, and do not editorialize on what people present (you are a facilitator, not a judge).

-If people seem uncomfortable with the way things are going, ask for comments and deal with them directly. Sometimes a 'straw vote' helps clarify how an audience feels about an issue. For example, you may ask: "How many people feel we have given enough time for questioning the last speaker?"

-If the meeting is running long, you may have to choose between extending the time or re-convening another meeting. Sometimes an extended meeting is essential for a resolution; at other times it becomes a frustrating squabble as people become increasingly tired and distracted. It is preferable if the chairman makes the decision, explains the reasons, and asks for assent; avoid calling for a vote, as this can act as a precedent in other areas.

OPEN HOUSES

The Open House frequently replaces the public meeting as a consultative technique. Some practitioners feel that it is a more constructive vehicle than are public meetings. A greater number and diversity of interested people can obtain information and register their views.

General Guidelines

An Open House is an event at which citizens can drop in at a central facility during announced hours to view displays, ask questions, or discuss issues with agency staff.

The Open House is usually located in some valued local space, such as a room in a library, school or church; and runs from 2-9 p.m. so that it is accessible to mothers with small children, teenagers returning from school and adults, before or after supper. Visitors may come at any time and stay for as long as they like. (In some rural areas in winter 1- 6 p.m. works best.)

A series of display panels, arranged on easels in a rough circle, present the purpose of the project, the study team, various aspects of the issues, evaluation criteria, alternative solutions, etc. Often a diagram on one panel is followed by a short text explanation on the next so the visitor can obtain a grasp of the whole project without being led by the hand and talked at.

An automatic slide presentation on a small cube with a 3-5 minute cycle is useful to present visual aspects of the subject. Note – if chairs are provided, occupants will inhibit the desired flow.

A table with hand-out material is usually provided. Coffee and doughnuts or sandwiches should be available, preferably by contracting with a local group. The primary character of an Open House is a free-flowing conversation directed by the visitors. People can come whenever they wish, stay as long as they wish, and address whatever topics interest them in whatever order they choose. As a result, the staff talk with a larger number and broader cross-section of the population than happens in the typical public meeting. The quality of the exchanges is usually much higher; the participants pose thoughtful questions and wrestle with alternative solutions. In many cases, problems can not only be raised but actually resolved, unlike what usually occurs in a public meeting.

An open house can be effectively combined with a public meeting or other activities. For example, an all day open house might be followed by a public meeting held the same evening. The open house would provide information to the public, then in the evening the public could give reactions back to the agency.

A variation on the open house is to invite interest groups to set up booths, so that citizens can walk around the room and get a sampling of the opinions of all the major actors. In several cases the open house has even been expanded into a "fair", with recreational and social activities part of the program, along with food and beverages.

Feedback

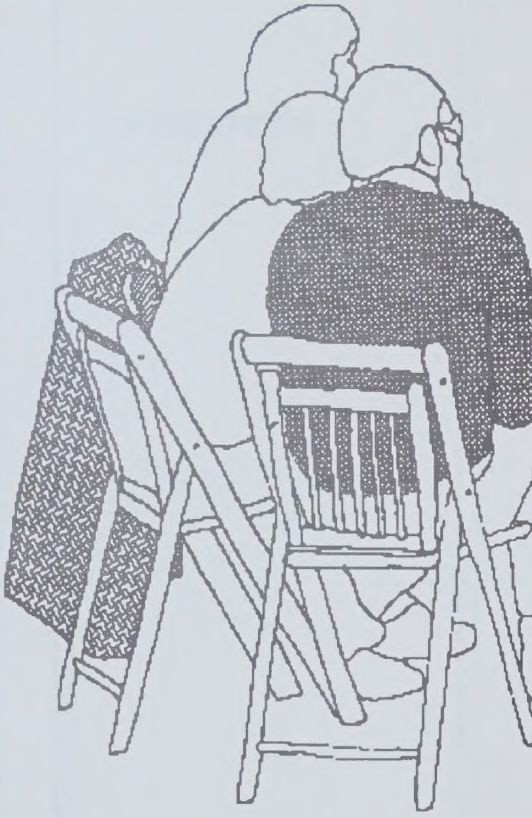
The systematic gathering of informed public response is a vital feature of the Open House. Staff, wearing name tags which also indicate their subject matter, carry pads of Open House record forms (see sample) on which to record individual comments, concerns, questions and suggestions. Where staff cannot provide immediate answers, they note the name, address and phone number for later follow-up. Visitors are most appreciative when staff undertake to refer questions or concerns which are not part of their project to the relevant organizations.

While an Open House is free to enter, visitors must pay to get out – by completing a short exit check list! This generates quantitative data such as weights on evaluative factors or ranking of alternatives. Background data obtained, such as geographic location or occupation, enables cross-tabulation.

Staffing

Staffing can usually be lighter during the day than in the evening. It is important to manage so as to avoid overcrowding. An Open House held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. may readily deteriorate into a regular public meeting, in contrast to one held from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. which is unlikely to do so.

In one recent case, 250 people attended an Open House from 2-9 p.m. Two staff were present from 2-6:30 and four for the evening. Some 30 Open House record forms and 130 exit check lists were completed. The staff were able to interpret the project appropriately to housewives, environmentalists and businessman.



Pages 42-44 are excerpted with permission from Connor, Desmond M., "The Open House" in Constructive Citizen Participation: A Resource Book, Development Press, Victoria, B.C., Revised edition, 1988, pp. II 14-15.

When staff are preparing Open House panels, it is important that these are informative rather than persuasive and informal rather than formal. Finished graphics have a non-verbal message that additional suggestions are too late.

The Open House is a powerful learning and problem-solving device which is readily adapted to most planning projects and the characteristics of most of the participants. It typically attracts a larger number of people and a broader cross-section of the community than the typical public meeting.

Preceding Publication

An Open House is designed to follow 7-10 days after a publication has provided people with the basic information on the subject and an opportunity to reply with little effort. This could be a display advertisement or tabloid insert in the local newspaper with a tear-off coupon or a brochure, distributed by householder mail, with a reply paid postcard.

During the incubation period following the publication, people have an opportunity to follow media coverage of the issues, discuss it with neighbours and become more prepared to make the best use of the Open House.

Staff Training

As a minimum, staff should gather to identify probable questions and establish brief, correct and consistent responses to them before the Open House.

Prior to a set of Open Houses dealing with one very controversial project, the staff reviewed some 30 probable questions and role-played their responses as if each were asked (a) by an interested housewife, (b) a high school science teacher, (c) an older farmer and (d) an angry environmentalist. An assertiveness training film "When I Say No I Feel Guilty" (International Telefilms) was also used with considerable value.

Follow-up

After one or more Open Houses, it is important to:

1. Have a debriefing meeting with the staff to obtain their reactions, insights and suggestions for improvements at future events.

2. Analyze the response and make it available (a) to the planning team and (b) to the local media in a news release so residents will know the sentiments of the community at large.

3. Get back answers to questions recorded at the Open House and forward requests for action by other organizations.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops are extended public meetings in which participants are engaged in review of information, detailed definition of issues, problem solving, or plan review. Workshops are expected to produce results, as well as being forums for educational materials.

Workshops are useful when dealing with complex topics where the public needs briefing on technical matters, as well as time for detailed consideration. Workshops can be used at many stages of a public involvement program. A workshop is particularly useful as a method for detailed public review more expeditious than the extended involvement methods.

Some uses of the workshop format could include:

-selecting a public involvement program from among various options.
-reviewing a plan, or developing a single mutually acceptable plan.
-defining issues or problems, possibly in rank order.
-developing alternative solutions to a specific problem.
-reviewing the operational results of a plan which has been implemented.
-presenting a technical study and reviewing its implications.
-developing terms of reference for studies.
-developing a list of the critical impacts that must be considered in evaluating alternatives.

Selection of Participants

The optimum size for group effectiveness is 5-7 people. The need to have all interests represented, however, usually means that most small group meetings will have as many as 20-25 participants. Even with larger numbers, however, some people may feel excluded. Some of the methods which can be used to prevent this problem include:

Repeat Meetings. A meeting format can be developed which can be repeated as often as necessary, allowing opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate to go through the same experience.

Daytime Meeting/Evening Meeting. One approach to the problem of people feeling excluded is to conduct the workshop during the day, followed by an evening meeting at which everybody gets a chance to review the

product generate during the day. Attendance at the small group meeting would be designed to ensure that the full range of values within the community is represented.

Interest Group Selection. An alternative method is for agency staff to conduct a careful analysis and identify the interests that need to be represented. Through consultation with the interests, agency staff would then identify those people whom the interests feel could best represent them.

Steps in Designing a Workshop

The following steps are useful in designing a workshop or small group meeting:

1) Identify the Desired Product. Identify precisely what the product is that should result from the meeting, such as a set of alternatives, a list of impacts to be evaluated, and so forth.

2) Identify the resource information that the public will need. Identify what information the participants will need in order to complete the desired product. This information should be written in simple, understandable, layman's language, and presented in a format which makes it easy to find and grasp, so that the least amount of meeting time is spent locating needed information. This material might be incorporated in a small workbook which contains group or team assignments, exercise instructions, resource materials, and any hand-in response forms.

3) Select or design a series of activities which will result in the desired product. In some cases there may be previously used meeting formats which will result in the desired product. If not, design a set of activities which will produce the needed materials. The usual technique is to write simple, clear instructions for group activities and give the groups substantial responsibility both in how the activity is completed and the product which is produced. The series of activities could incorporate small group processes such as Brainstorming, or Nominal Group Process.

4) Design a simple mechanism for evaluating the product. Once participants have worked together there is still a need for them to evaluate what they have accomplished or to place some priority on what they think is most significant. Without an opportunity to evaluate, participants may feel restricted by the meeting for-

mat or feel that all points covered during the meeting are receiving equal weight. This evaluation mechanism could be a hand-in response form or a straw vote or weighted vote to establish priorities.

Using Small Group Processes

A number of small group processes are designed to improve group effectiveness in one way or another. Two of these are described in Chapter 15 of the manual.

Brainstorming. Brainstorming is a technique for increasing the number and creativity of ideas expressed in a group. It is an effective means of developing a lot of ideas in a hurry, but does not help in evaluating those ideas.

Nominal Group Process. Nominal Group Process is a technique to help groups generate and prioritize a large number of ideas. It has also been successfully used for consensus formation. Nominal Group Process is based on research suggesting that people generate more ideas working by themselves, but in the presence of others.

General Rules

Many of the problems with preparing a public meeting apply to workshops; however workshops are more structured and less likely to go "off the rails". Here is a checklist for preparation:

Follow the **"preparation checklist"** for a public meeting:

-Vary the agenda between general presentations to the assembled participants and small group working sessions with from seven to 15 participants.

-Ensure there are fully briefed facilitators for each working sub-group. Finding experienced facilitators is often difficult; ask your local service club for assistance.

-Supply all sub-groups with instructions, agenda, tools, documents, and work space.

-Have a coordinator visit each sub-group to answer questions and keep contact with what is happening.

-Ask each sub-group to record their results on a blackboard or flip charts and to present them when called back into general session.

-Arrange for publication of a workshop summary for circulation to all participants.

-Hold a post-mortem to assess workshop results and decide on any further action.

CHAPTER 3

EXTENDED INVOLVEMENT

ADVISORY GROUPS

One of the most frequently used public involvement techniques is the establishment of an advisory group, a relatively small group of people who represent various interests, points of view, or fields of expertise, to advise the agency on proposed actions or a specific proposal.

Advisory groups can:

❑ Help set study priorities, or help "scope" the study.
❑ Review technical data and make recommendations regarding its adequacy.
❑ Help resolve conflicts between various interests.
❑ Help design and evaluate the public involvement program.
❑ Serve as a communication link between the agency and other interests and agencies.
❑ Review and make recommendations concerning the decision making process.
❑ Assist in developing and evaluating alternatives.
❑ Help select consultants acceptable to the public.
❑ Review and make recommendations regarding the study budget.
❑ Review written material prior to release to the general public.
❑ Help host and participate in public meetings.
❑ Assist in educating the public about the proposed action and the decision making process.

Advisory groups are effective because:

1. They provide a cross sampling of public views and concerns.

2. Members of the group have a chance to become informed about the issues before coming to conclusions, and have a better understanding of the consequences of decisions. The result is that their counsel to management combines a citizens' perspective with a thorough understanding of the situation.

3. Because personal relationships are developed in the group, members of the group develop a deeper understanding of the concerns of the other interests, and

establish relationships which serve as a moderating influence on more extreme views.

4. Advisory groups can serve as a communication link back to the constituencies they represent, and advisory groups may be able to reach a consensus among conflicting groups.

Guidelines for Establishing an Advisory Group

There are several general principles that should be observed in establishing advisory groups:

❑ An advisory group must represent the full range of interests and values of the interested publics. An advisory group that represents only interests that have traditionally supported agency activities misleads the agency andundermines the credibility of the entire public involvement effort. To be effective, an advisory group must provide representation for all groups that see themselves as potentially affected by the proposed action.

❑ The group's role in decision making must be clearly defined. Confusion about the role of the advisory group, coupled with the natural desire on the part of the members to exercise maximum influence on the outcome, can be a source of problems. This problem can be avoided if there is a candid discussion of the group's role in decision making at the outset. A written mandate which carefully outlines exactly what is expected of the group and project time lines is helpful.

❑ Normally the life of the group – or at least the terms of the group's members – should be limited. The longer a group exists, the more likely it is to become an elite. Public advisory committees have a tendency to outlive their usefulness, and so the group's purpose, as well as the members' tenure, should be monitored. Most public involvement comes from issues which have a direct effect on groups or individuals.

Once those issues are resolved, the original participants lose interest in attending meetings. Sometimes a group's purpose is still valid, but the danger exists of appearing to co-opt potential adversaries. This can be resolved through regular change in representation.

❑ Efforts should be made to insure that members of the advisory group maintain regular communication with the constituencies they are supposed to represent. Group members should inform their constituencies through briefings, organiza-

tional newsletters, public meetings, or occasional interviews or discussion with other leaders from their constituency. This will ensure that the representative reflects the views of the constituency, and that the group is educated along with the representative.

❑ Agency participation should include line managers. It is extremely important that responsible line managers interact with the advisory group, both so the group feels that it is being heard by people with genuine authority, and so that managers hear public concerns firsthand.

❑ Agency representatives must speak the public's language when working with advisory groups. This is essential to communicate effectively, but is no simple task; it requires the ability to simplify technical language and jargon without appearing to be patronizing.

❑ The agency must be prepared to provide time and logistic support commitment.

Selecting Advisory Group Members

In an informal advisory group questions of membership will be low priority since membership may be changing constantly. But in a formal advisory group, it is crucial to use a technique for selecting members which ensures that the group is representative of all the interests.

While there are always many voices in a community, there are usually only a few clear categories of public interest. When you want representation from a community, it is often better to draw members from among those who identify with a particular interest category, rather than a particular organized group.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, this approach gives a comprehensive but manageable group. Secondly, it ensures that even with small numbers, no important set of public values is unrepresented.

There are five basic methods for selecting advisory group members:

1) Members can be selected by the agency with an effort to balance the different interests. This is by far the most frequently used technique, but on very controversial issues runs the risk that the public will believe the agency has established the group to support its position.

The danger that the public will see the membership as

biased can be reduced if affected interest groups and agencies are consulted prior to selecting the members and the selections clearly reflect this consultation process.

2) The selection of the advisory group can be turned over to a third party or group. Depending on how localized the issue is, the selection process could be turned over to a local elected body, a community leader or politician, a public involvement consultant, or to a small group representing the major interests who in turn select other members.

3) The agency can determine the interest groups it wishes to have represented and allow the groups to select their own representatives. This can create problems for volunteer groups, which sometimes have difficulty coordinating among themselves to select a representative. However, it eliminates the risk of being seen as "stacking the deck".

4) Use any of the three methods above and augment the membership with volunteers. This allows the different interests to adjust the membership of the group by obtaining volunteers from their ranks. If the advisory group will vote on issues, though, this method permits the various groups to "stack the deck" by adding a large number of additional volunteers.

5) Membership can be determined by a popular election. This last method has been used only in a few cases where there was some existing structure for selecting representatives, such as neighborhood councils.

Establishing Procedures for Advisory Group Meetings

Balance of public interest in working groups does not guarantee harmony, effective compromise, or acceptable results. Balanced membership does give the group initial credibility. When the work begins, continued credibility depends on:

-the quality of group process
-clear commitment from the government agency to support technical andinformation needs of the group
-participants levelling with their colleagues
-good communications with the wider public

There are a number of procedural issues which normally have to be settled at some point with groups that will be working together for some time.

An advisory group may choose to devote its first meetings to agreeing on procedures, although protracted debate can seriously undermine enthusiasm. It may be advisable to prepare and pre-circulate a draft of proposed guidelines for revision and adoption by the advisory group.

Voting. Probably the single most important procedural decision is whether or not subsequent decisions will be made by voting.

Most groups in Canada are used to voting on issues and assume automatically that this is the right way to make decisions. However there are several reasons why voting is usually not the best way for advisory groups to make a decision.

First, despite efforts to make the advisory group broadly representative, there is no guarantee that representation of interests on the advisory group is proportionate to those interests among the public at large. A vote may merely reflect an imbalance in the composition of a group rather than a view of the majority of the public.

If the objective is to work towards some sort of consensus outcome, a badly divided group serves little purpose. Only if there is some kind of consensus is the advisory group likely to have much impact on either the public at large or agency decision makers. A split vote simply means there is a continuing disagreement, which could have been determined without an advisory group.

An alternative to voting is to obtain a "sense of the meeting". The meeting leader listens carefully until there appears to be a consensus, states this as his or her "sense of the meeting", and checks to see if it is acceptable to the group. This approach requires a good sense of timing, the ability to summarize effectively, and a credible leader. If it is impossible to reach agreement on the sense of a meeting, the meeting leader asks the group how to resolve the controversy. One possibility is to keep talking. Another is to vote. Another is to have majority and minority reports. Still another is to obtain agreement on procedures for resolving the key factual issues that prevent resolution. Finally, it may be best to drop consideration of an issue until the next meeting, giving people a chance to think about the issue more.

Attendance. Some groups wish to establish minimum attendance requirements for membership, eg. a member who is absent more than a

certain number of times is dropped from the group.

Alternates. Another issue related to attendance is whether or not members can send alternates to participate in meetings. This can be a problem if the group has decided to make decisions by a majority vote. But if voting rights are not involved, then sending alternates is one way to keep everybody informed. If alternates are not kept informed of what occurred at previous meetings, however, it is very frustrating to the regular members.

Participation of Observers. A ground rule may need to be established concerning observers, eg. if they are welcome at group meetings and, if so, whether and when they may speak.

Subcommittees. It may be necessary to establish subcommittees to accomplish specific work tasks. If so, the responsibilities and authorities of the subcommittees should be clearly defined.

Confidentiality of Materials. If the group will be reviewing documents that will undergo substantial modification before being made public, rules may be required to govern the confidentiality of these materials. Many experienced public involvement practitioners simply assumed that anything turned over to advisory groups, regardless of requests for confidentiality, is now a public document.

Constituencies. Specific mechanisms may need to be set up to ensure regular communication with constituencies being represented by group members.

Parliamentary Procedures. Formal parliamentary procedures, such as "Robert's Rules of Order", assume an adversarial position among the participants, and also assume that issues will be resolved by voting rather than consensus. For this reason, it is advisable to minimize the use of formal meeting procedures. If the group leader has the trust of the group, it is usually possible to get things done more readily without the use of complicated meeting procedures.

Group Member Expenses. It should be established right at the beginning whether travel expenses and other costs related to participation in the group will be borne by the agency or by individual members. In the event they will be borne by the agency, the rules for expense reimbursement should be clearly defined.

CONCENSUS GUIDELINES

One way of getting working compromises is to make decisions by concensus. A decision reached by concensus is an agreement where all parties accept a balance of gains and losses to achieve a single result. If the parties start from very different positions, concensus-seeking may take much longer than a simpler 'majority rules' approach. The results, however, are more likely to be used and to be more durable in practice. The following guidelines will assist working groups to achieve concensus:

❑ Take time in the beginning of the group's life for members to meet other members as colleagues, rather than as antagonists across a negotiation table. This may require field trips, guest speakers, or other common activities where resource issues are looked at in general.

❑ Have each member write a short statement of what they wish to achieve through the group's work, then discuss these expectations in an information sharing meeting.

❑ Ensure each member understands the group's final terms of reference, and the kinds of results consistent with those terms.

❑ Before trying to address issues, make sure that there is a clear and satisfactory statement of what the issues are.

❑ When proposals for a decision are being made, seek a number of options, rather than trying to draft a single statement. The options must embody the differing viewpoints of participants. They can then be examined by everyone for pros and cons.

❑ When different viewpoints or options are presented, take the time to hear each participant, without judging or condemning the proposal at first hearing. Most communication gaps begin with problems in listening, and unwillingness to let a speaker make his point.

❑ Everyone must be willing to re-open issues or concerns already decided, if a new compromise changes the way a member perceives the balance of interests taking shape. Tolerance for this review must be balanced by a respect for the group's work by each member.

❑ Concensus cannot survive if any members of the group are working to a hidden agenda or manipulative strategy. Concerns have to be explicit and all cards must be placed on the table.

❑ Sometimes, compromise is not acceptable to one or more of the participants in a working group. In these cases, it may not be possible to achieve concensus on a single proposal. The remedy for this situation is to present either a minority report, or to present a range of alternatives. With either approach, it is essential to give reasons for the alternatives, so that they can be assessed by the agency. It should be remembered that the closer to concensus a working group can get, the more likely it is that their recommendations will be accepted and implemented.

Scheduling Meetings. One of the issues that haunts every advisory group is whether to have regular group meetings or schedule them as needed. If meetings are called only when needed, it is difficult to notify members of each meeting and there are often scheduling conflicts. On the other hand there is no surer way to discourage interest and participation in an advisory group than to hold regular meetings that are unproductive or seem to have no purpose.

Staffing. Often advisory groups raise questions which require considerable study or follow-through. One important question that needs to be answered early is the level of staffing which will be provided to the group, and for what purposes.

Minutes. Agency staff are normally responsible for keeping the record of group meetings, but if there is a history of suspicion or mistrust, the group may want to assume this responsibility.

External Consultants. If advisory group members are suspicious of agency staff, there may be requests for external consultants who will assist the advisory group in reviewing highly technical plans or reports. External consultants are sometimes more credible to the advisory group than are agency technical staff.

Resolving issues such as these in the first few meetings can prevent hard feelings at a later date.

CHAIRING EXTENDED INVOLVEMENT GROUPS

The chairperson of a working group is responsible for assisting the process of group discussion and decision making. This role can only be managed if the person is either disinterested in the outcome of the work, or is capable of separating the function of the chair from advocacy of a particular position. A chairperson must be a competent and objective facilitator, and must have the confidence of the entire group. In many conflicts, the various participants begin the process with suspicions about each other. This decreases with time, through the offices of an even-handed chair-person. To achieve initial acceptance of the chairperson, you may need a community member from outside the group to chair the working sessions, as a community service. People willing to act in this capacity may be sought form educational institutions, service clubs, the clergy, or various professions where group facilitation skills are provided by

training and experience.

Guidelines for the Chairperson

Your role is to assist members in achieving results by ensuring fair and complete participation in the events at hand, and ensuring that the group focuses on the issues.

❑ Develop agendas in advance and check them with the group before proceeding at any meeting. Change agendas to meet emergent needs only after gaining approval of the group.

❑ Have a common set of rules of procedure.

❑ Agree on who shall speak for the group to outside parties, especially to the media.

❑ Arrange for regular minutes which distinguish records of discussion from decisions, and action requiring follow-up by a group member.

❑ From time to time, review the terms of reference and objectives of the group to assess progress. If necessary, remind the participants of the time constraints.

❑ If you must speak for an interest, vacate the chair for a brief period, handing it over to someone else while you make your comments.

❑ If you feel a personal conflict of interest arising, state the problem clearly to the group and ask for guidance. Maintaining group confidence of your impartiality is essential to continued progress.

❑ If, as chairperson, you have reacted to an outside request for information or attended a meeting in which the group's work was discussed, report this to the group at the next available opportunity. If you have the chance, let several group members know by telephone prior to the event, to find out their reaction. Sometimes you may have to refuse an outside discussion, without first checking with the group. This will likely be required in the early stages of the group's work, but is less likely to be a problem later.

The working group's productivity and its relationship with the wider public is generally improved if you arrange for regular public reporting, both to the media and through publication of interim reports.

PART 2

DICTIONARY OF TECHNIQUES

Part 2 outlines an extensive catalogue of both traditional and less traditional public involvement techniques. The techniques included are listed in Table 2. The directory is organized according to the five areas described earlier:

- ❑ Public information/ education
- ❑ Information feedback
- ❑ Consultation
- ❑ Extended involvement
- ❑ Joint planning

For each technique, the following topics are discussed:

1) a brief description;
2) advantages anduseful-ness;
3) limitations or problems.

For techniques for which there is not a large body of experience, advantages and disadvantages are not always presented.

This volume of the manual provides a description of techniques, but does not provide guidance on how to put these various techniques together into a coordinated program. Guidance on program design is contained in Volume 2 of the manual, which should be read before attempting to design a public involvement program.

The techniques are presented in the directory in the order shown in Table 2, The approach which the technique most typically falls within is described by an "x". **It must be emphasized, however, that a technique can frequently be employed in a public involvement program based on one of the other approaches.**

The index from the front of this document is replicated here to assist the reader in locating specific methodologies. An alphabetical listing of all techniques can be found in the index.

INDEX FOR THE DICTIONARY OF TECHNIQUES

Resources

Table 2
Public Involvement Techniques

	Public Information	Information Feedback	Consultation	Extended Involvement	Joint Planning
Public Information					
Advertising	X				
Brochures	X				
Citizen Training Programs	X				
Contests/Events	X				
Direct Mail	X				
Exhibits/Displays	X				
News Conferences	X				
Newsletters	X				
Newspaper Inserts	X				
News Releases	X				
Position Papers	X				
Political Preview	X				
Publications	X				
Publicity	X				
Public Service Announcements	X				
Reports	X				
Public information Feedback					
Analyzing Public Involvement Data		X			
Briefs		X			
Community or Social Profiles		X			
Computer Assisted Participation		X	X		
Content Analysis		X			
Focus Groups		X	X		
Interviews		X	X		
Policy Profiling		X			
Polls		X			
Questionnaires		X			
Surveys		X			
Written Submissions		X			
Consultation					
Brainstorming			X		
Coffee Klatches			X		
Conferences		X	X		
Delphi		X	X		
Dialogues			X		
Field Offices	X	X	X		
Large Meetings			X		
Nominal Group Process		X	X		
Open Houses	X	X	X		

Table 2 cont'd
Public Involvement Techniques

	Public Information	Information Feedback	Consultation	Extended Involvement	Joint Planning
Panels	X	X	X		
Participatory Television		X	X		
Phone Lines	X	X	X		
Public Meetings	X	X	X		
Simulation Games		X	X	X	
Technical Assistance	X	X	X	X	
Town Meetings		X	X		
Trade-off Games		X	X	X	X
Workshops			X	X	X
Extended Involvement					
Advisory Committees			X	X	
Charrettes			X	X	
Task Forces			X	X	
Joint Planning					
Arbitration				X	X
Collaborative Problem Solving				X	X
Conciliation				X	X
Mediation				X	X
Negotiation				X	X
Niagara Process				X	X

PUBLIC INFORMATION TECHNIQUES

ADVERTISING

Public involvement programs which are newsworthy are often able to obtain considerable free publicity (See News Conferences, News Releases, Publicity and Public Service Announcements). However there are times when paid advertising is a useful adjunct to the publicity program. Examples of uses of paid advertising include:

❑ An announcement of a public meeting or other public involvement activity.

❑ A weekly question and answer column regarding a proposed project.

❑ An overall description of a project and its impacts.

❑ A description of agency efforts to solve problems which have been identified as public concerns.

❑ A clip-out coupon for people wanting more information about a decision making process.

❑ Advocacy advertising, to clearly communicate the agency's position on an issue. "If you want it said right, say it yourself". (Globe and Mail Brochure)

The effectiveness of advertising rests substantially on how well it is prepared. The most important thing is to establish a clear image of the kind of people to be reached. Many people depend solely upon television for their news and information, but often these are not the people who are likely to be active in public involvement programs. The selection of appropriate media is tied to the kind of people that need to be reached. Cablevision is easy to access because of CRTC regulations about community programming; some inexpensive "teaser" advertisements in other media can greatly increase the viewing audience of cable.

One word of caution: in small communities where radio, television and newspapers are all struggling and all competing for the same advertising dollar, there can be ill-feeling if all the advertising goes to one media. If, for example, all the advertising dollars go to the local newspaper, the radio station may feel less cooperative about providing free public service announcements. It is necessary to spread the advertising budget around, to ensure that no one feels offended

and cuts off the free publicity.

A different philosophy prevails in larger cities where the advertising departments and news departments are kept separate. In this circumstance the editorial department is usually not aware of whether or not advertising has been bought, and will not consider this relevant in deciding the newsworthiness of a story. In fact a newsperson is likely to be offended by the suggestion that free publicity is "owed" because of all the advertising the company buys from the newspaper.

Advantages of Advertising

The primary advantage of paid advertising is that the agency can communicate its message just the way it wants. With free publicity, the media will provide its own slant and interpretation based on what they think is most newsworthy. This may or may not provide complete information, and may not have the emphasis desired by the agency. With a paid advertisement, the agency is in charge of the material, and the manner in which it is presented.

Advertisements reach a wide range of publics, including people who would otherwise not know about the program and who would be unlikely to participate in other kinds of public involvement activities.

While advertisements are primarily a way of informing the public, rather than getting information back from it, it is possible to include clip-out coupons or questionnaires as a way of getting public response.

Limitations of Advertisements

The primary limitation of advertisements is that they may be perceived by the public as an attempt to "buy" goodwill. Everybody knows that advertisements cost money, so the perception can develop that the agency is spending large sums of taxpayers' money in an effort to push its point of view. The expenditure of funds for advertising to push a point of view is particularly offensive from a government agency. Opponents of the agency's proposed actions may seize on the expenditure of advertising money as an issue to use against the agency.

For this reason considerable caution should be exercised in spending large sums of money on advertising. Advertisements announcing upcoming meetings are likely to be appreciated, rather than criticized. But

frequent full page or prime time advertisements are likely to be criticized, although this depends on their tone and content, and the overall context. If the tone is "hard sell", then criticism is almost guaranteed. But if the tone is objective and factual, recognizing some of the problems that may be associated with the agency's proposed actions, then people will be slower to criticize.

BROCHURES

Brochures are usually a brief summary of the study or proposed action(s), the issues involved, and the opportunities for public involvement. Typically, the purpose in issuing a brochure is to reach additional publics or inform known publics of the public involvement program, or a new phase of a study or decision making process.

The usefulness of a brochure depends on its ability to attract interest; therefore, visual appeal and the way in which it is written are extremely important. However, it is equally essential that a brochure be written objectively and not attempt to "sell" the agency position.

If the brochure is printed on light cardstock, it may include a detachable reply-paid postcard addressed to the project soliciting comments, questions and suggestions. Remember, you pay only for the cards returned; you need a permit number for Canada Post. Often some 85 percent of the respondents will add their names, addresses and other identifying information if asked. You can then sort the replies by geographic area, occupation etc.

Advantages of Brochures

Brochures are a direct means of providing a large amount of information to many people in a relatively economical manner. They save staff time which would be involved in repeating the same information to a number of people. Brochures also document agency efforts to obtain public involvement.

Limitations of Brochures

Preparation and approval of a brochure can be time-consuming (although less time-consuming than repeating the same information to a number of people).

CITIZEN TRAINING PROGRAMS

Training programs for citizens may be conducted to provide them with enough technical background so that they can participate more effectively,

and will feel more equal in relationship to agency staff. They may also be conducted to help citizens work together more effectively. Finally, they may be conducted to teach citizens about a topic (such as conservation techniques) in order that they can subsequently train others.

Examples of Citizen Training Programs :

-A citizen advisory group received extensive training in utility operations in order to make recommendations on electric rate policies and standards.

-An advisory group received training in communication skills and meeting leadership in order to work together more effectively.

- Citizens were invited to attend all-day training sessions on energy conservation as part of an effort to come up with a community energy conservation plan.

- Citizen group leaders were taught facilitation skills to lead small groups during public meetings.

Training can be accomplished formally through seminars, workshops, or lectures or it can be conducted informally through simulation games, roundtable discussions, "brown bag" lunches, publications or audiovisual materials.

Advantages of Citizen Training Programs

Training can increase the effectiveness and impact of public contributions to the decision making process. Also, after receiving training, citizens may feel less intimidated by technical staff and other agency officials. The result can be that they react less defensively, are able to make suggestions in a manner which is more understandable to technical people, and express their concerns more openly.

When properly trained, citizens may also work together more effectively, and can assist in conducting the public involvement program.

Disadvantages of Citizen Training Programs

Some citizens may resent the suggestion that they need training or may question the agency's intent to conduct an objective training program.

Training usually must be limited to a small group. This presents no problem if the training is being given to an established advisory group. But if the training is being offered to the general public it raises the problem of selecting participants.

CONTESTS/EVENTS

One way to stimulate interest in a topic or gain publicity is to stage a contest or other event. Usually the contest or event is clearly related to the topic of the public involvement program.

Examples of contests or events include:

-An essay or poster contest for school children on environment related topics.

-A fair for displaying energy conservation ideas and devices.

-An award for excellence in community planning.

In many cases these awards or events will be newsworthy locally, and will catch the attention of the local media for the entire public involvement program. Media attention, in turn, can help increase participation in other public involvement activities. In fact, a contest or other event is best planned to provide publicity for subsequent workshops, public meetings, or advisory group participation. This way the public is not disappointed by having its interest aroused, but finding no way to express this interest.

Advantages of Contests/ Events

Contests or events can gain publicity for the entire public involvement program, and can also help to draw out those people interested in a particular topic or issue.

Limitations of Contests/ Events

Participation in the contest or event may not generate public comment that is directly applicable to the decision making process at hand.

Unless the contests or events lead directly into other public involvement activities, they arouse interest and create expectations for continuing participation which can lead to resentment if no further opportunities for participation are provided.

DIRECT MAIL

Direct mail is one way of informing every household in a geographic area about a project or program. Through the postal service, flyers and newsletters can be delivered to areas as small as a single letter carrier route at a third class bulk rate.

Advantages

Direct mail ensures that every single household in an area is informed about the project, and so is useful to those situations where complete coverage is desired.

Limitations

Direct mail can be costly, especially for projects where a large number of households must be informed but the percentage interested in the issue is likely to be small. Flyers and newsletters can easily be lost with other "junk mail", so they need to be well designed for public appeal.

EXHIBITS/DISPLAYS

One techniques that has been frequently used to inform the general public of a public involvement program or to obtain comment from the public is to set up exhibits or displays in such places as shopping centers.

Exhibits may be particularly useful in reaching publics that had not previously been interested in the issue, so were unlikely to participate in public involvement activities. Exhibits and displays also serve an educational purpose even when people choose not to participate. Exhibits should be coordinated with other public involvement activities so that people who indicate an interest as a result of seeing an exhibit can be informed of other ways they can participate.

The nature of the exhibit is particularly important. A fixed exhibit, which provides general information but does not require staff presence, usually generates less interest than a staffed booth at which some activity is taking place. This is particularly true in situations where there are numerous other exhibits or booths. Some of the things which have been done to spark additional interest include:

-Comments from people who visited the booth were videotaped and played to passersby, who were also invited to make comments.

-Comments from the public were recorded on flip charts and displayed where everybody could read them.

-Response forms were provided so that passersby could write comments regarding issues addressed in the display.

Advantages of Exhibits/ Displays

Exhibits/displays provide information to the general public about issues important to the agency. They also reach people who do

not ordinarily participate in public involvement programs, and may get them interested in future participation.

Disadvantages of Exhibits/Displays

A staffed booths requires a major commitment of staff time.

An exhibit that is not coordinated with other public involvement activities may arouse interest without providing any method for follow-up.

NEWS CONFERENCES

Whenever there is a major story to make available to the media – such as announcement of a controversial decision – a news conference is one way to get additional interest and involvement from the media for the story.

The normal news conference consists of a brief statement by an agency official followed by questions from the media. The statement will usually be videotaped for television coverage, as will be some of the questions and answers. Both the spokes- person's statement, as well as general background on the issue, should be printed and distributed to the media. This will assist the media and protect against misquotes.

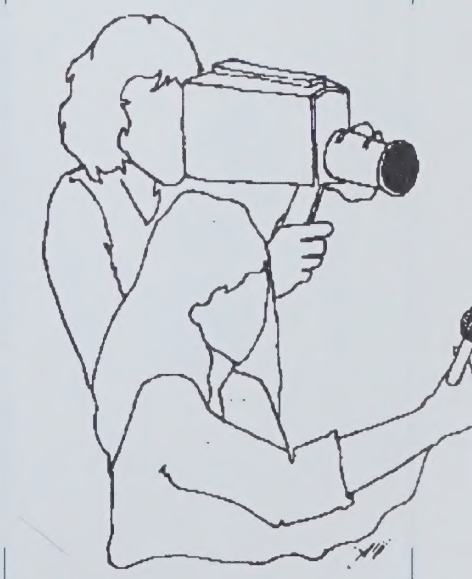
News conferences are only effective when there is a major story. A reporter is under tight time pressure, and it takes time to get to the news conference, set up (if television), record the event, and get back to his or her office. In the same time several other stories could be produced. What the news conference does offer, if the story is newsworthy, is actual quotes or footage of the announcement, plus an opportunity to ask questions.

When holding a news conference to announce a story which could affect a local community or neighborhood, it is advisable to consult with local community leaders in advance in order to identify any sensitivities and avoid offending local officials by taking them by surprise.

Advantages of News Conferences

News conferences can increase the amount of coverage given to a story.

News conferences usually result in a number of direct quotes, permitting the agency to tell its story directly, rather than as interpreted by the reporter.



Limitations of News Conferences

News conferences are only effective when a story is extremely newsworthy, or a "name" figure is involved. Use of news conferences without a newsworthy story will result in a loss of credibility with the media.

News conferences require careful advance planning and coordination to ensure that all statements are prepared in the proper written form, the media is adequately notified.

If an issue is a sensitive one, the news conference can provide an opportunity for negativism to feed on itself and encourage the reporters to outdo each other in their critical and suspicious questions. The tenor of most of the resulting articles is likely to reflect the most negative reporter present. When the proponent tries to make sense to one party, he or she is likely to offend those with different points of view.

If this scenario is a possibility, a more effective approach will be issuing a news release, followed by a telephone discussion with individual reporters and a face to face interview if necessary. (See News Releases)

NEWSLETTERS

Periodic newsletters are a means of sustaining public interest in a study or proposed action, as well as documenting the progress of the decision making process.

A major purpose of a newsletter is to inform the public. But newsletters also serve the function of maintaining the visibility of the decision making process, particularly during stages when technical studies are under way and there is little opportunity for public involvement.

The value of the newsletter rests entirely upon its ability to stir up public interest and encourage involvement. A drab newsletter riddled with bureaucratic or technical jargon will elicit little enthusiasm, despite the effort you put into it. It is important that newsletters distributed to the public also be distributed internally, so that staff are at least as informed as the public.

Newsletters can have response forms printed in them, such as tear off coupons or reply cards. This assists in making the flow of information two way.

Advantages of Newsletters

Newsletters can be an important tool for keeping the public informed of the results of studies and the progress of the decision making process. They can be particularly helpful in maintaining interest during periods when technical studies are on-going and and there are few opportunities for public involvement.

Limitations of Newsletters

Preparation of newsletters can be time-consuming and printing and mailing costs can be expensive.

NEWSPAPER INSERTS

One technique which has been used to provide information to the general public, and at the same time solicit public comment, is an insert distributed through the local newspaper. This describes the study or decision making process and the various means by which the public can participate, and includes a response form on which readers can express their opinions or indicate a willingness to be involved in other activities. Most newspapers are able to handle the distribution of inserts for a modest cost per copy, since this is a frequent advertising technique, and they can often print the insert at considerably less cost than commercial printers. However, because of the numbers of copies involved, the total costs of the insert can be high.

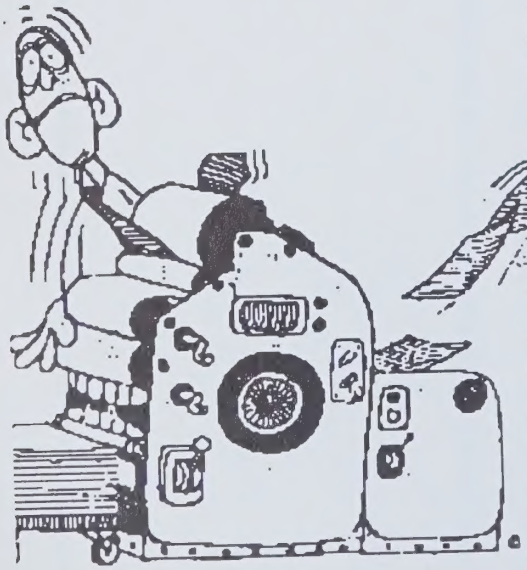
Most urban newspapers are able to distribute inserts to selected geographic areas, rather than their entire readership, so that it is possible to target the insert at those readers who will have the greatest interest in the study or proposed action.

The percentage of returned response forms is not likely to be very high, yet in terms of total quantity the insert may provide a means of participation for a very large number of citizens, compared with other public involvement techniques. Because people who complete the response form are self-selecting, a statistical bias is introduced into the responses, so the results cannot be considered statistically valid.

Advantages of Newspaper Inserts

Newspaper inserts reach a much greater percentage of the population than other public involvement techniques.

Newspaper inserts provide an additional means for



identifying individuals and groups interested in participating in public involvement activities.

Limitations of Newspaper Inserts

The total cost of an insert can be high because of the large number of copies printed and inserted.

The response rate of people mailing back a response form is low, and cannot be represented as statistically valid.

NEWS RELEASES

A major technique for obtaining publicity is issuing news releases. News releases are short (usually 1-3 pages) announcements of information which – hopefully – will be covered by the media. Often the news release is accompanied by more detailed background information. In some cases, the media will use material word for-word from the news release; in others, the news release will simply provide background for a larger story. Frequently media people will respond to a news release by calling for additional information before writing their story.

The key to whether or not the information from a news release is picked up by the media is "newsworthiness". If the media think the story will interest their readers or viewers, then they will give it attention. This requires that the person writing the story identify the "slant" on the story which makes it newsworthy, and write the news release accordingly. It may also require telephone follow-up to be sure a story is run.

News releases are normally prepared and issued by a Media Relations Office, or by an area or district office, but there are a few general principles that are worth knowing in case it is ever necessary to write a news release:

News releases are written so that all the most important information is in the first paragraph, the next most important information in the second paragraph, and so forth. The reasons for this are:

1) the first paragraph must capture the interest of the editor or producer, or he or she may read no further and there will be no coverage; and

2) when a story is squeezed into a limited time slot or small space the story will be cut from the bottom up, so that any important information in the bottom paragraphs will be cut.

Other general guidelines for news releases – or any other materials for the media – include:

1) Keep sentences short.
2) Use simple language instead of complex.
3) Use the active voice.
4) Add quotes or conversation to the story.
5) Avoid wordiness.
6) Write as if it were a conversation.
7) Relate the story to the reader's experience.
8) Do not overuse adjectives, ("dynamic", "outstanding", etc.)
9) Use a consistent style.
10) Be honest and strive for accuracy.

A news release can be followed by a telephone call to individual reporters and a face to face interview if necessary. When you meet one-on-one, you can bring out the questions and issues relevant for each particular print or electronic medium.

This approach is consistent with endeavouring to develop a close and continuing relationship with key reporters during the life of a project or program. By making this investment of time and energy, you are much more likely to respond to the reporters' constraints of time and space and thus obtain more effective news coverage.

Advantages of News Releases

News releases are an effective way of obtaining publicity for a story, and often stimulate the interest of the media to stories which go in greater depth than the news release itself.

Limitations of News Releases

The media will not provide coverage for news releases on topics they do not consider newsworthy.

POLITICAL PREVIEWS

At the beginning of any public involvement program, it is a good idea to inform those elected representatives whose constituents might be affected by a project. A briefing session, either with all representatives present, or individual briefings are both possibilities, depending on the particular situation. A briefing session should be preceded by the preparation of a briefing paper or other documentation as required. Such a briefing session(s) can be held prior to any official announcements or press conference of the project or the public involvement's program's start-up. In this manner, elected representatives will be fully informed should they recieve quer-ies from constituents.

Documentation should include any reports which will be distributed during the subsequent program, plus a copy of the public involvement plan itself.

POSITION PAPERS

Position papers are brief publications outlining a way of dealing with a particular issue. They are a proposal, inviting reaction and comment. Position papers may give management alternatives to test public response, and may seek new ideas or options from the readers.

Position papers are used to test new policies, planning approaches, solutions to problems , recommendations from working groups, or other proposals that may have an impact on the public. They can also be used by public working groups to test ideas with other people, before the group's recommendations are finalized.

The position paper should:

- ❑ state clearly the source of the paper, the tentative nature of the proposal it contains, and how feedback will be used;
- ❑ be prepared so readers can write in the margins;
- ❑ specify to whom comments are to be written, preferably on a pre-addressed detachable insert;
- ❑ give enough time for responses (if aimed at the general public, give at least two months to allow for regular meetings or organized groups to take place; do not count the summer holiday period as part of your response time period); and
- ❑ identify a contact person for questions which may need interpretation.

Publish a revised paper which uses the responses received and shows how the final version will be used. Make sure this paper is mailed to those who have responded.

PUBLICATIONS

In most public information and participation programs, the primary means of providing people with basic information is print. Whether in the form of a brochure sent by householder mail, a display advertisement or tabloid insert in a newspaper, or a report or booklet of some kind, print is typically the cheapest means of distributing information.

Unlike the electronic media, print messages are relatively long lasting. In contrast to the demands of public meetings, print reaches it readers in the comfort and security of their own homes, enabling its message to be

absorbed with a minimum of anxiety and at the recipient's convenience.

When communicating large quantities of information, some sort of publication is about the only mechanism of communication. The media are useful for communicating summaries of information, but not for detailed and complex information.

Publications must be written with great objectivity and a concern that all points of view are accurately represented. This differs from public relations documents which are designed to "sell" a particular position by presenting it in the best possible light. However, the attractiveness of a publication, and readability, are essential to obtain interest. To be credible, a publication should acknowledge that the agency is aware of the public's concern about the project.

A simple, clear, direct style of writing is important, even in technical publications. For information to be delivered through newspaper inserts or direct householder mail, the "Fog Index" (the percentage of words with 3 or more syllables) should be consistent with the material usually read by the public in the program area. For example, a rural weekly may have a Fog Index of 6, an urban newsmagazine 10 and a planning report 20. Ensure that the character of the material is informative rather than persuasive.

Advantages of Publications

Publications are about the only means of communicating detailed and complex information to the public.

Publications permit the story to be told in what the agency believes to be an "objective" manner, rather than with the slant provided by the news media to increase newsworthiness.

Limitations of Publications

Publications are usually designed to reach a limited audience, particularly if they are lengthy.

Considerable staff effort and cost goes into the preparation of publications.

PUBLICITY

Newspaper, radio, and television are all major communication vehicles for reaching the broad general public. Since the cost of paid advertising would be astronomical if used every time information must be provided to the public, a well-designed program to obtain free publicity can be an essential element in any public involvement program.

There are several different kinds of publicity that can be obtained through the media, depending on the newsworthiness of the issue:

Community calendars. Most media offer occasional community calendars containing brief announcements of meetings or events.

Public service announcements. While most radio and television stations will broadcast some public service announcements, they do not have to run the announcements of any one organization, and are usually in the position of picking and choosing among the announcements sent them by a number of organizations. Public service announcements may be sent to radio stations either in the form of a written script or a cassette recording. Since television is a visual medium, public service announcements for television may be accompanied by slides, or by videotape. Videotapes must be up to industry standards, and will not be the same size used in most personal or corporate videotape systems.

News conferences. A news conference is an event at which members of the media are invited to be present when a major announcement is made, or an opportunity is provided to ask questions of a "name" figure. Normally news conferences include both a formal statement and a question and answer period. News conferences can lead to increased media interest, but are only effective if the story is very newsworthy.

Media coverage. The media will often send reporters to cover the events at a public meeting or other activity. Often these stories are the general public's only source of information about what occurred.

Feature Stories. If a story is very newsworthy the media may also be willing to do a feature story. Feature stories are usually in depth stories designed to provide background, rather than just coverage of immediate events. Because they are not tied to specific events, it may take several weeks of coor-

dination before a story actually appears.

Call-in/Talk Shows. Many radio and television stations offer call-in or talk shows at which notables, or people involved in newsworthy issues, appear as guests. Often listeners are able to phone in and ask guests about their experiences or the topic being discussed.

While it is perfectly reasonable to make every effort to obtain free publicity and present the story as effectively as possible, keep in mind that the media are in the news business, not the publicity business. Unless media people are persuaded that the story is newsworthy, it will receive minimal coverage.

Media relations staff often have established contacts within the media, and will have ideas about which media or reporter will be interested in which kind of story, and how to present a story to attract their interest.

The most important thing to remember in all media relations is to maintain credibility. There are definitely times when the media can be extremely helpful but only the if they can rely on the agency for accurate and complete information. If reporters feel that they are being manipulated, this will usually translate into negative stories, and an inability to utilize the full publicity potential of the media.

Advantages of Publicity

Publicity obtained through the media is often the only cost effective way of reaching the general public.

Information appearing in the media often has higher credibility than publications prepared by the agency, since critics are likely to see agency publications as self-serving.

Limitations of Publicity

If the media do not see a program as newsworthy, it will be difficult to obtain publicity. The media are in the news business, not the publicity business.

Credibility must be maintained with the media, even if it means releasing potentially embarrassing information. Whenever the press feels manipulated, stories will become more negative, and it will be harder to get coverage.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

All radio and television stations are required to provide public service news coverage and programming as a condition of keeping their license. If a public involvement program is newsworthy, it should be relatively easy to obtain free publicity announcing a next meeting or inviting public involvement by sending Public Service Announcements to local radio and television stations.

Public Service Announcements sent to radio stations are usually in the form of prepared scripts of varying lengths from 10 seconds to a maximum of 60 seconds. As an alternative, many stations will accept prerecorded announcements on a cassette. The use of humor or other attention-attracting devices increases the likelihood that the material will be used. Since the announcer will "speak" the story, sentences must be brief and simple, so that they sound conversational.

Because television is a visual media, television stations prefer that the script be accompanied by slides or prerecorded on video. Both the slides and video must be up to television industry production standards.

Although radio and television stations must provide free public service time, they have no obligation to provide publicity for any particular program. The requests for time they receive usually exceed the available public service time. As a result it is best to assume that the amount of coverage will depend upon the extent to which the story is newsworthy, rather than because of any obligation of the radio or TV station.

Advantages of Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements provide a way of obtaining free publicity through the media for public involvement activities.

Limitations of Public Service Announcements

Radio and television stations are under no obligation to run a particular public service announcement, so some stations will run the announcement, and some will not.

Public service announcements must be very brief, so the amount of information which can be communicated is limited.

REPORTS

Throughout the course of a public involvement program it is often necessary to issue one or more reports summarizing the current findings of studies or detailed information about the issue or proposed action being considered. Reports are most likely to be needed:

1) when issues or problems have been thoroughly identified or described;
2) after conceptual alternatives have been developed, and
3) when the impacts of the alternatives have been identified.

Many technical reports, and even some supposedly "public" documents such as hearing reports, are often very difficult for the public to read. An executive summary in layman's language should always be prepared; depending on the complexity of the report, the summary may be sufficient for the majority of citizens, with the more detailed reports sent only to those who are sufficiently interested or have the technical training to digest the full report. It is also advisable to make copies of the full report available at the project office and on the reserve shelf of the local library. In this way other interested professionals can access the technical information easily.

The extent to which reports are read depends largely on the readability and visual attractiveness. However, reports issued as part of public involvement programs should not be "slick" or look expensive. This can give the impression that the agency is trying to "buy" the public's favor, and may imply that decisions have already been reached (why else would someone be willing to spend so much for graphics, etc.), when they really have not.

One effective way to protect against negative public reaction to reports is to ask an existing citizens' advisory group to review the report before it is issued to the public. This usually results in early detection of any problem areas, before the report has been widely distributed.

Advantages of Reports

Reports are often the only effective way of communicating detailed technical or complex information. Printed reports are comparatively low in cost compared with any other way of communicating the same information.

Reports also provide a visible record of the public in-

ible record of the public involvement process, so that it is always clear what information has been communicated to the public.

Limitations of Reports

The public will read reports only if they are easy to understand and visually attractive. Reports that are written in industry jargon or technical lingo will normally be read only by other technical experts. Preparation of readable and attractive reports will take time and talent for explaining complex material simply, without appearing patronizing.

In many cases it is necessary to develop report summaries for distribution to the general public, with the full reports sent only to technical experts or organized groups.

PUBLIC INFORMATION FEEDBACK

ANALYZING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DATA

See Content Analysis.

BRIEFS

A request for written briefs is a formal method of seeking the views of organized public interest groups, industries, and local government. Briefs give a sense of judicial process and require strict adherence to form. Written briefs range from simple letters to fully researched papers.

Written briefs are needed when there are many organized groups who need a chance to put their case directly before the agency. Because this method allows for carefully considered positions to be researched and developed, it is useful for supplementing less formal public involvement methods. Written briefs give a concrete record of public comment, and therefore are valuable when policy is being developed.

If written briefs are required, the following rules apply:

-a clear statement of the subject of the briefs must be published;

-enough time must be allowed for people to do the research and writing;

-the agency must make all necessary information available to the brief writers;

-receipt of briefs should be acknowledged in writing;

-a summary of the main points of each brief should be compiled, to aid cataloguing and assessment of concerns, advice or proposals;

-all briefs submitted should be available at a viewing centre; and

-a formal paper in response to the briefs must be published, to show how the briefs have been used.

COMMUNITY OR SOCIAL PROFILES

The community or social profile is a comprehensive summary of the key characteristics of the people of a community or study area. Its purpose is to orient planners, engineers and administrators to the social and cultural realities which they need to understand and take into account if a project, program or policy is to be accepted. It can assist the decision maker in assessing how a community is likely to respond to a new

project or program. Community profiles are discussed at greater length in Chapter 1.

COMPUTER BASED PARTICIPATION

In recent years there has been considerable interest in using computers as the basis for new forms of public involvement. The basic approaches identified to date include: conferencing, interactive polling, simulation, or interactive computer graphics.

Computer Based Teleconferencing: The techniques of computer conferencing have been developed primarily to link participants who are geographically dispersed so that they can communicate by sending and receiving messages on remote terminal keyboards. Information, including graphics, can be made available to all participants in the same form simultaneously, and it is also possible for the agency to respond to questions asked by the public about that information. Computer conferencing could allow task forces or advisory groups meeting in separate communities to conduct a meeting which allowed for dialogue, sharing of information, and responses form the various communities.

Interactive Polling: Equipment and software programs have been developed which allow participants in a meeting to indicate their responses to statements, alternatives, or proposals by voting on a hand-held computer console. The computer collects and stores the votes, and a summary is shown on a large electronic display at the front of the room. A skilled moderator can work with the group to identify areas of consensus or disagreement and areas in which additional discussion is needed.

Computer Based Simulation: Simulation games are designed to take people through a series of choices and provide them with feedback on the consequences of their choices in meeting defined objectives. Uses of simulation games have been as varied as modeling the diplomacy leading to nuclear war, evaluating the impact of a series of choices on a natural resource base, or assessing the social consequences of alternative policy decisions.

Computer Based Interactive Graphics: A number of systems are currently being designed in which the computer displays a range of alternatives, then re-displays the alternatives or impacts in response to questions or changed group priorities.

This technique will allow a group to watch a computer display while discussing the issues and, in effect, ask the computer to display different alternatives based on different sets of assumptions or priorities.

Advantages of Computer Based Participation

Computer based techniques will permit participation of geographically dispersed people, so long as they have access to the appropriate computer consoles and telephone network. In the future, technical information about a proposed agency action could be stored in the computer and called up by a citizen at any time. Programs could even be developed that would permit citizens to raise questions and request clarification of the information.

Interaction polling permits people to be involved while offering anonymity when desired. Through the use of two-way cable television the same approach could be used to get community-wide decision making.

Interactive graphics and simulation games are both designed to help people visualize the implications of various priorities and assumptions, and may encourage the development of a consensus.

Limitations of Computer Based Participation

The availability of computers still has not reached the point that the techniques described above are useful except in specialized circumstances.

These techniques assume that participants supply their own computers. Since computers are expensive, use of these techniques may either exclude people who do not have computers, or require the agency to provide access to computers.

Many people still feel intimidated by computers. People may also resent having to participate in a preset format dictated by the computer.

Fascination with technical equipment can sometimes gloss over continuing political conflict, giving an unrealistic impression of the political realities of a situation.

Technical problems with the computers can occur at times which prove embarrassing and frustrating.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is a research tool used in sociology, journalism and political science to analyze the actual content of newspaper articles, letters, briefs, and submissions. Content analysis can be used to analyze the comments an agency receives during a public involvement program. The technique is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1 of this volume.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are a market research technique which was developed as an alternative to expensive survey research techniques. A manufacturer introducing a new car might want to know people's reactions to the car in order to target an advertising program. Rather than surveys, which might cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, the manufacturer might use focus groups to get a "quick-and-dirty" assessment of public reaction.

Focus groups are open ended discussions among 8-10 individuals about a particular product or choice. It is customary to seek specific diversity of background and viewpoints among the participants so they represent important elements or publics. The discussion group is led by a moderator who is skilled in drawing out the comments and reactions which will have significance. Several focus groups will be convened, until the moderator can anticipate the comments that will be made. Usually this requires 3-4 groups. The moderator then prepares a report summarizing what was said, and draws inferences for marketing of the product or idea.

The concept of focus groups can be applied to most situation where public reaction is sought. A series of focus groups might be used to anticipate community reaction to a proposed project or proposal. The information drawn from the focus groups would help "tailor" the proposal, anticipate and respond to probable concerns, or convince the agency that public reaction would be so negative as to make the proposal unwise.

While focus groups do not provide a statistically valid analysis of public reaction to an idea or product, they do offer an inexpensive way to get a "feel" for what the general public reaction will be.

Advantages of Focus Groups

Focus groups provide a quick way to determine what public reaction is likely

to be to a proposal or project.

Focus groups are inexpensive compared to other market research and polling techniques.

Focus groups provide an impression of general public reaction, instead of just the reactions of organized groups and interests.

Limitations of Focus Groups

Focus groups do not have strong statistical validity, and could be misleading if there are major sampling errors.

The moderator of focus groups must be skilled at drawing out significant comments. This may require hiring an outside consultant experienced at running focus groups.

Focus groups help predict reactions, but do not substitute for discussions with the critical interest groups.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews can be informal, loosely structured discussions, or they can be part of a poll or survey in which the interviewer asks only carefully worded pretested questions.

Interviews can be an effective part of a public involvement programs. A series of 30 to 60-minutes interviews with representatives of all the key interests can provide a quick understanding of the issues, the dynamics between the interests, and the intensity of their interest in the issue. Several days of interviews can often produce an extremely large amount of information about an issue.

For further information on interviews refer to Chapter 1 in this volume.

POLICY PROFILING

Policy profiling is a technique for assessing the impact of various individuals, groups and organizations on governmental agency decisions. The purpose of policy profiling is to provide a systematic framework and checklist which decision makers can use to make sure they carry out the kind of analysis required to assess the consequences of a decision. Policy profiling also aids decision makers in organizing their staffs and making use of other knowledgeable observers.

The basic assumptions behind policy profiling are that in order to assess the impact of relevant individuals, groups and organizations on any possible decision or course of action, it is neces-

sary to do the following:

❑ Identify the individuals, groups and organizations (the "actors") that are likely to have a direct or indirect impact on the course of action. This means including those who have a formal role in the making or blocking of the decision; it also means including those who have an indirect impact, such as those who will make it either easier or harder to carry out a decision after it is made.

❑ Determine whether each actor supports, opposes, or is neutral toward the decision.

❑ Determine how powerful each actor is in blocking the decision, helping make it happen, or effecting the implementation of a decision.

Policy profiling has several valuable uses:

-focussing different perceptions of the political situation
-forecasting outcomes
monitoring changes in position
-identifying the potential for consensus

The actual technique employed in policy profiling requires more detail to explain than is appropriate here.

POLLS

Polls are a technique for measuring the mix of opinions held by the public. Polls are conducted by trained interviewers who ask each person interviewed exactly the same questions, and in the same order Polling can be conducted over the telephone or in person.

These questions are pretested to be sure they are clear, unbiased, and elicit the information desired. The people interviewed will be part of a sample population chosen using rules accepted by professionals in the field as guaranteeing the "randomness" or lack of bias in the sample chosen. Statistical research has been conducted to establish standards for how many people must be interviewed from a total population to insure reliability of the findings to certain levels of confidence, eg. the figures are accurate plus or minus five percent. The level of confidence can be increased by increasing the number of interviews conducted.

Polls differ from questionnaires in that the responses are tallied by the interviewer. Mailed or self-completed questionnaires are completed by the person responding and are often more open-ended. Because questionnaires may be more

open-ended, they may provide more information, including information other than than anticipated by the questioner. However, polls – precisely because they are not open-ended – have greater statistical reliability.

Since polls are normally designed and administered by professionals trained in polling techniques, the costs of polls are relatively high.

Refer to Chapter 1 for more information on the use of polling techniques.

QUESTIONNAIRES

One effective method for soliciting public comment is through the use of questionnaires. There are similarities between questionnaires and polls, but questionnaires are usually completed by the person responding while the recording of responses to polls is done by the interviewer. Also questionnaires may invite open-ended responses, while polls limit the options.

For me..... how nice..... just another wee survey?

The primary advantage of questionnaires (and polls) is that it is possible to reach out beyond the organized groups to the "unorganized public". Questionnaires, because they are more open-ended, often obtain more information than do polls. But the trade-off is that less structure also reduces the level of confidence that the information is statistically valid and reliable.

Refer to Chapter 1 in this volume for further information on questionnaires.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Written submissions in a public involvement program can be formally requested, as are briefs, or can be an informal response from the public in a public involvement program, such as letters, statements or unsolicited arguments that a group or individual may submit. In the case of an informal response, there would likely be no deadline for the receipt of submissions, and so the agency would not know when to cut off receiving submissions in order to begin content analysis.

CONSULTATION TECHNIQUES

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a group technique designed to increase the group's creativity. In brainstorming, everyone in the group is encouraged to come up with as many ideas as possible, including "way-out" ones. Usually these ideas are then recorded on a flip-chart or blackboard. No evaluation is permitted until everybody is completely out of ideas.

Brainstorming is a way of generating a large number of ideas or alternatives in a hurry. Other techniques must be used for evaluation.

There are also more "advanced" versions of brainstorming in which additional techniques are employed, using different types of analogies to increase group creativity.

Advantages of Brainstorming

Brainstorming helps groups "break out" of the obvious solutions and push for more creative solutions. It also greatly increases the number of solutions which are generated.

Brainstorming provides a "psychologically safe" climate in which people feel free to participate without fear of being judged.

Disadvantages of Brainstorming

Some people may react to brainstorming as being gimmicky.

Brainstorming generates so many solutions that it is hard to evaluate them all afterwards.

COFFEE KLATCHES

The coffee klatch is a small group meeting usually held in a private home. The emphasis is on informality; the intent is to create the feeling of neighbors getting together to discuss local concerns. Typically coffee and cookies are served as part of the effort to create an informal feeling. The host or hostess will normally open the meeting, then turn the meeting over to the agency's representative. Agency staff will usually make a brief statement or presentation, then the remainder of the session is spent in informal discussion, questions and answers, etc.

Experience with coffee klatches has shown that be-

cause they are held in people's private homes, people are on "good behavior" as a matter of courtesy to the host or hostess, yet there can be informal give-and-take.

Coffee klatches have proven very effective in rural areas, where they are a social event as well. A local district agricultural officer may be able to help identify families willing to host a coffee klatch.

Advantages of Coffee Klatches

Coffee klatches provide an opportunity for give-and-take between the public and agency staff, but in an informal atmosphere which does not encourage speech-making or polarization. Because of the informal atmosphere, the public often gets the feeling of knowing agency staff as people, not just in their official role. This helps break down an-tagonism and stereotypes.

Disadvantages of Coffee Klatches

Because each coffee klatch reaches only a limited number of people, it can take a lot of coffee klatches to reach a large audience.

The term "coffee klatch" offends some managers, who somehow associate it with women's afternoon teas, etc. Behind this initial reaction there may also be a fear of the kind of interaction which a coffee klatch requires. Coffee klatches are on the public's turf, and are less predictable than normal public meetings. The result is that some managers may feel personally vulnerable at the thought of informal interaction in someone's home.

CONFERENCES

A conference is a meeting of one or more days during which technical experts or representatives of various interests are brought together to discuss an announced topic. Often conferences include presentations either by guest speakers or by participants. Although the emphasis is typically on learning, a conference or series of conferences could lead to agreement among technical specialists on a controversial technical issue, or procure an agreement on priorities among interest groups. Even if there is not yet 100 percent agreement, a conference provides an impression of the "climate of opinion" among the leading experts, or can assist in creating a similar climate of opinion when everybody is exposed to the same data.

Conferences could be a useful part of a public involvement program if the decision making process involves resolution of a technical controversy. Examples of recent conferences on important decisions include:

❑ A conference of representatives from companies, agencies, and academia to agree on research priorities for developing methodologies for assessing the social impacts of rapid energy development — the so-called "boom town phenomena".

❑ A conference of international scientists to discuss the state of the art of research on the storage of nuclear waste, and recommend future research priorities.

❑ A conference of environmental specialists from utilities and governmental agencies to discuss methodologies for assessing the cumulative effects of energy development upon fish and wildlife.

Other examples can be taken from almost any technical field.

Conferences which are intended to lead to some sort of agreement should be carefully designed to ensure interaction among people with conflicting points of view, rather than just the formal presentation of technical papers.

Another use of conferences is as a wind-up to a public involvement program consisting of responsive publications, Open Houses and planning workshops. The conference can provide a public opportunity for individuals and interest groups to present their positions to a large audience and the media. A typical format might be: introduction; half hour presentation by proponent; an hour for 6-8 interest groups to present their comments on the project in 5-10 minute presentations; open microphone for participants form the floor to comment or raise questions for the proponent or the interest group leaders (about an hour); lunch (during which time some participants will likely leave). The remainder participate in self-selected workshops on different aspects of the project for 1-2 hours and then report back for a closing plenary. Such a conference would usually be held on a Saturday. The proceedings can be videotaped and made into a short video (perhaps an hour) and copies provided to relevant cablevision stations and for use by the proponent and interest groups later. (Total video cost about $2,000 for taping and editing). Note that the video must have a balanced perspective, and not just be

sales job for the proponent.

Advantages of Conferences

Conferences may lead to a "climate of opinion" or consensus of experts which can serve as the most informed estimate in trying to resolve a difficult technical question. Conferences result in a sharing of information and research which can often result in a change of opinions. Discussing the same topic for several days increases the importance of that topic to the participants.

Limitations of Conferences

Conferences take considerable time and energy to plan. Also the cost of bringing leading experts together – often from throughout the country or world – is high. In addition to planning time, costs include transportation, room and board, honoraria (if any) and the cost of the conference facility.

THE DELPHI PROCESS

The Delphi process was designed as a means of obtaining a consensus on forecasts by a group of experts while attempting to minimize any dysfunctional effects of group dynamics.

To accomplish this, the Delphi process solicits the advice of a group of experts on questionnaires, provides feedback to all participants on the statistical averages of the responses, and reports on the reasoning of those participants whose answers differ substantially from the norm, while preserving the anonymity of the participants. The panel of experts is then invited to revise their initial responses as appropriate, and a final composite answer is derived.

The prime purpose of the Delphi process is forecasting, so it is useful in those cases where forecasts are controversial politically. Instead of having an agency technical specialist make all the projections – with the likelihood that these projections will be viewed as biased – the projections can be made by a panel of experts using the Delphi process. To the extent, however, that participation is limited to experts, the consensus among the experts still may not be shared by the general public.

Not only does the Delphi process appear to help experts work effectively in developing a consensus, it also has high reliability, i.e. two groups of experts forecasting the same event will tend to come up with similar predictions. The basic steps in the Delphi process are:

1) An open ended and unstructured questionnaire is submitted to each participant. This questionnaire asks participants to indicate their forecasts concerning the topic, eg. anticipated energy consumption in twenty years.

2) The person acting as "director" of the activity consolidates the responses and prepares a list of forecasts.

3) The director then distributes the lists to the participants and requests that they make an estimate of the occurrence of each event. ("Never" is one possible answer.)

4) The participants' responses are collected and a statistical summary prepared. The summary will contain the median and the inter quartile range for each forecast.

5) The statistical summary is distributed to all participants, who are asked to give a new estimate now that they have seen the summarized response. Participants whose answers fall outside the interquartile range are also asked to state the reasoning behind the answers.

6) These responses are then summarized statistically.

7) The new statistical summary, along with the reasoning of those whose responses are significantly different than the norm, is distributed to each participant, and a final estimate is requested.

8) A final statistical summary of these estimates is made.

Advantages of the Delphi Process

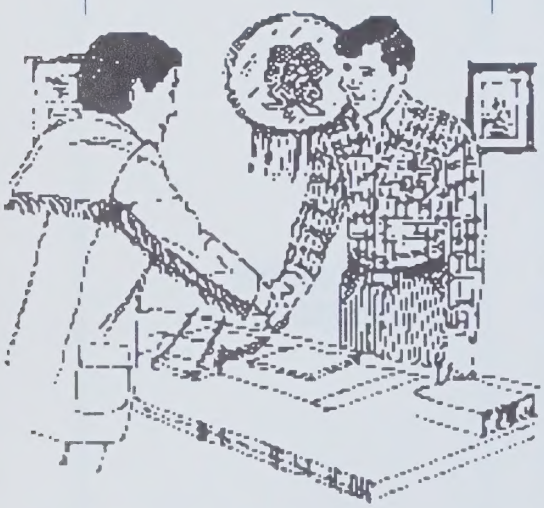
The Delphi process is an effective tool for achieving a consensus on forecasts among a group of experts. It also minimizes the negative elements of group dynamics, such as over dominance by a single personality or positions taken to obtain status or acceptance from the group.

Disadvantages of the Delphi Process

The Delphi process may have a tendency to homogenize points of view and encourage "conventional wisdom".

The process of mailing questionnaires and redistributing summaries for several iterations can be time consuming and cumbersome.

Participants may prefer to interact directly with one another rather than through the agency, particularly if



they are suspicious of the agency.

Delphi still involves a small group of experts, and the public may be no more willing to accept that opinion of a group of experts than it was to accept the opinion of agency staff.

DIALOGUES

Dialogues are a form of conference initiated to improve communication between major interest groups such as industry and consumers. A group of 20-24 people are invited to attend a two day dialogue on a selected topic or issue. The participants could be two parties (such as industry and environmental interests) or they could be from several groups.

Representatives could be selected by an independent consultant who takes into account ability to effectively present a position without being unduly antagonistic or abrasive.

Dialogues are held in a retreat setting, with minimal opportunities to "escape" to nearby golf courses, etc. The schedule allows for ample socializing time, as one of the purposes of the dialogue is to encourage the development of personal relationships between the leaders of the interest groups.

The dialogue begins with an informal social event at which introductions are made. During the first working session which follows, each participant has 3-5 minutes to state his or her feelings about the topic being discussed during the conference. In subsequent working sessions there is a loose but adaptable agenda covering the major aspects of the announced topic. A neutral meeting facilitator helps the group stay on the track, encourages participation and makes sure everybody feels listened to.

The hope is that the interest group leaders will take back not only specific ideas, but also the feeling that open communication is possible and desirable.

Advantages of Dialogues

Dialogues encourage open communication between management and leaders of groups that are often critical. The flexible schedule and retreat setting also encourage the development of personal relationships, helping break down stereotypes and role casting. Dialogues are often helpful in defining the points of common interest between the agency and citizen groups.

Limitations of Dialogues

Dialogues usually focus on a broad general topic, and do not address specific actions which are under consideration. In fact, dialogue sessions are specifically designed to reduce the participants' perceptions of each other as adversaries. If a dialogue session were held as part of a public involvement program to consider a specific action, participants would be far more likely to have to defend fixed positions, and be less willing to drop barriers and get to know other participants personally. As a result, dialogue sessions are probably more effective as a general program of sensitizing management to the concerns of citizen groups, or whenever there is a general topic to be discussed, rather than as an element in a public involvement program considering a proposed action.

FIELD OFFICES

Agency planners and decision makers often work far from the site of a study or project, or in some other way are physically isolated from people who are likely to be affected by a decision. A field office provides the opportunity for more informal interaction with the community. Typically, a field office is located in a highly visible part of the community so that the largest number of people will know of its existence. A shopping center or downtown store front is a good site. On construction projects a trailer or other mobile unit could serve as a field office.

The field office is staffed by people working on the study or project who are able to answer questions and solicit opinions from the local community. The office is designed to encourage "drop-ins" and other types of informal interaction with the community, with exhibits, charts, maps, brochures, and other materials on display. Field office staff are encouraged to be involved as much as possible in the local community. If large enough, the office can be the site for meetings, seminars, workshops, open houses, and other events. By housing these activities, the field office becomes the focal point for participation in the decision making process.

A field office might also be particularly useful where there is a seasonal influx of users from a wide geographic area, for example, a resort area which draws tourists. The field office would facilitate participation by users who might otherwise be unaware of the decision or issue under study.

Advantages of a Field Office

A field office provides a visible means of informal interaction with the local community at the convenience of the residents.

The presence of a field office communicates the value the agency places upon community sentiment.

Field office staff often obtain a deeper understanding of community needs and desires than do agency staff who live and work far away.

Limitations of a Field Office

A field office can be costly to staff and operate.

Unless the project or issue is of considerable local interest, the amount of use of the field office by local residents may not justify its cost. If more than one community is involved, those communities that do not have field offices may feel slighted.

LARGE MEETINGS

When issues are controversial, public meetings may have audiences ranging in size from several hundred to several thousand people. Such meetings are often noisy, lengthy and occasionally confrontational.

The primary advantage of large meetings is that everybody has access to the same information, hears everybody's position, and observes the interaction between the various interests. This provides both visibility and credibility to the process.

But there can be problems with large public meetings. The first problem is that even though there may be several hundred participants or more, it is still possible to hear from only 20-30 in an evening. Although the sentiments of the audience can sometimes be surmised based on applause for speakers, often it is only possible to determine that there is a great deal of interest; the positions of many of the people who attend will remain unknown.

In the same way that large meetings are a good opportunity to communicate information, they are also a marvelous time for individuals or groups to make impassioned appeals to the audience to win them over to their position. The result is that there is often a good deal of maneuvering taking place by organized groups to be sure that they gain maximum advantage from the event. Organized groups may be sure the audience is packed with their supporters, may assign

speakers to cover particular topics in order to be sure that all their points get covered, and may make an effort to have their speakers called on at those points in the meeting when their presentations will have the most impact. Leaders of interest groups may even make demagogic appeals to the audience to walk out, keep agency representatives from speaking, etc. At times large public meetings can take on the air of a three-ring circus. And precisely because this is the one time that leaders must be seen defending the interests of their constituency in front of their own membership, there can be considerable posturing, and the likelihood that positions will be hardened rather than moderated by the meeting.

Another problem with large meetings is that they create that the impression that "the public has spoken", resulting in the expectation that the agency is obliged to accept the dominant point of view at the meeting as the "true" expression of public feeling. In other cases there is a clear cut consensus, but it may not take into account other needs or interests, eg. a local community may oppose an action that has broad regional benefits.

Leadership of a large public meeting can either be very easy, if the audience is cooperative, or it can tax the most skilled of meeting leaders. Steps can be taken to increase the effectiveness of a large meeting, which are described in Chapter 2.

Advantages of Large Meetings

Large meetings are an effective way of exposing a large number of people to the same information, the positions of all the interests and the interactions between interests.

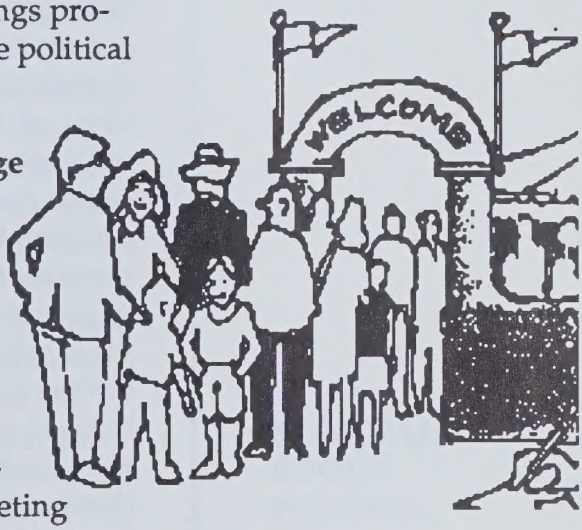
Large public meetings provide visibility to the political process.

Limitations of Large Meetings

Only a small percentage of the audience has a chance to speak.

There may be manipulation of the meeting by interest groups, creating an impression of public sentiment which does not accurately reflect the feelings of the general public.

Large meetings tend to increase polarization of positions, rather than encourage negotiations of agreement. Guidelines for conducting large meetings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.



LARGE MEETINGS

NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS

The nominal group process is designed to help groups generate creative ideas and information. It has also been used by some as a technique for generating consensus. The principles of nominal group process come from research suggesting that people generate more ideas and information when they work in the presence of each other, but do not interact at first. According to this research, when people interact in groups they are more likely to react to each other's ideas, rather than come up with new ideas. Nominal group process avoids this problem by having people generate their own ideas on paper before sharing the ideas with others, and by having people report their ideas in a structured manner which encourages production of the largest number of ideas. Nominal group process also results in a simple numerical ranking of the ideas generated by the participants. The complete nominal group process takes at least one and a half hours to complete. It can be expanded to occupy an entire meeting, or portions of the technique can be used as part of an overall meeting format.

Although nominal group process results in a ranking of ideas, this is more in the nature of a quick straw vote, and is based on only a minimal discussion or evaluation of the ideas. As a result participants must understand that the rankings they give are very preliminary and not binding. Careful staff analysis of the utility of the ideas may produce a very different outcome.

The procedure for nominal group process is as follows:

1) Opening Presentation: After an initial presentation describing the nominal group process, the audience is broken into small groups of 6-9 participants.

2) Discussion Leader and Recorder: Each group is assigned a discussion leader and a recorder. Prior to the meeting, these staff people will have put up a minimum of four sheets of newsprint, and also have ready a supply of felt-tip pens, scratch pads, pencils, and index cards.

3) Introductions: The discussion leader will introduce himself/herself, and invite everyone in the group to do the same.

4) Posing the Question: The discussion leader will then present the question which is to be answered.

This question will be carefully worded in order to draw out the specific information desired. This question will be written at the top of one of the flip chart sheets.

5) Generating Ideas: Participants are provided with paper and asked to write down all the answers they can think of to the questions posed. These notes are for their own use only and will not be collected.

6) Recording Ideas: Each person is then asked in turn for one idea. The idea will be summarized by the recorder on the newsprint, as accurately as possible. No discussion is permitted, except that people may suggest alternative wording to the recorder. The discussion leader will keep going around the room, one idea per person, until the group is out of ideas. Anyone can say "pass" without giving up their turn on the next round. The process continues until everyone is "passing". Participants are not limited to the ideas they have written down, but can share new ideas that have been triggered by others' ideas. Alphabetize the items on the list: A-Z, AA-ZZ, etc.

7) Discussion: Time is then allowed for discussion of each item, beginning at the top of the list. The discussion should be aimed towards understanding each idea, its importance, and its weaknesses. While people may criticize an idea, it is important that they simply make their points and not get into an extended argument. Move rapidly through the list, as there is always a tendency to take too long on the first half of the list, not leaving enough time to do justice to the second half. This activity usually takes a minimum of about forty minutes, and can be permitted to take considerablymore time if desired.

8) Selecting Favored Ideas: Each person then picks the ideas that he or she thinks are best. Instructions should be given to select a specific number, such as the best five, or the best eight. These ideas should be written on index cards, one idea per card. Participants may prefer just to write the letter of the item on the list (A, F, BB, etc.) or a brief summary, so that they do not have to write out the entire idea.

9) Ranking Favored Ideas: Participants then arrange their cards in preferential order, with the ones they like the most at the top. If they have been asked to select eight ideas, then they put an "8" on the most favored idea, and number on down to a "1" for their least

favored idea among the eight selected.

10) Scoring: A score sheet should then be posted which contains a list of all the alphabet letters used on the lists of ideas. Then the participants call off the items they selected,and the points assigned to each, eg. "G-eight points, L-seven points, A-six points, etc". When all the scores have been shared, tally the score for each letter of the alphabet. The highest scoring item receives the number one ranking, and so forth. Post the rankings for the top 5-10 ideas, depending on where a natural break occurs between high scores and low scores.

11) Discussion of Results: The participants may then want to discuss the results. Depending on the time remaining in the meeting this discussion may be brief or lengthy.

12) Reminder of Subsequent Analysis: Participants should be reminded that staff will conduct a detailed analysis of all items, not just the ones receiving high ranking. They should also be reminded that this analysis could result in a considerable change in the ranking of items.

Advantages of Nominal Group Process

Nominal group process is an effective way of generating a large amount of ideas or information. It also provides a rough preliminary estimate of the acceptability of the ideas to the public. Emphasis in nominal group process is on the number of ideas generated, rather than on evaluation of ideas.

The nominal group process is a format which permits people of very different views to work together with a minimum of friction or disagreements. Having worked together effectively in this manner once, they may be able to work together more effectively in the future.

Limitations of Nominal Group Process

As indicated above, nominal group process is good for generating ideas, but only does a cursory job of evaluating them. Detailed staff analysis of the ideas is still necessary.

Because nominal group process does generate a ranking of ideas, it can create the expectation that the agency is bound by these rankings, even though they are very preliminary.

Nominal group process is a

very structured activity, and people who come to a meeting to express their feelings, and particularly to win others over to their point of view, may feel restricted and resentful of the structure. Some people may feel "processed" rather than consulted.

OPEN HOUSES

An open house is an event at which citizens can drop in at a central facility during announced hours to view displays, ask questions, or discuss issues with agency staff.

The Open House is usually located in some valued local space eg. a room in a library, school or church, and runs from 2-9 p.m. so that it is accessible to mothers with small children, teenagers returning from school and adults before or after supper. Visitors may come at any time and stay for as long or little as they like. (In some rural areas in winter 1-6 p.m. works best.)

A series of display panels, arranged on easels in a rough circle, present the purpose of the project, the study team, various aspects of the issues, evaluation criteria, alternative solutions etc. Often a diagram on one panel is followed by a short text explanation on the next so the visitor can obtain a grasp of the whole project without being led by the hand and talked at.

Advantages of Open Houses

The primary purpose of open houses is to educate citizens regarding the study or proposed action. Open houses accomplish this in an informal manner, at the convenience of the participants. Because of the informality there is an opportunity for direct interaction between agency staff and citizens. This provides an opportunity to correct misinformation, and permits in depth exploration of citizens' opinions. It also permits the development of personal relationships between staff and citizens. With open houses, it is often possible to speak directly with more citizens than at a public meeting.

Limitations of Open Houses

Open houses are primarily a tool for informing the public rather than getting information from the public, although it is possible to obtain public response through feedback sheets or response forms. To be effective open houses must be well publicized, and informative displays must be prepared. This can require considerable preparation

and staff time.

Normally open houses are held at the convenience of the public, so may require evening or weekend time from staff.

Further information on open houses is provided in Chapter 2.

PANELS

One technique for bringing out a range of ideas at a meeting is to establish a panel of experts or leaders who interact in front of the audience. The value of a panel is that interaction between the panelists can result in raising new issues, clarifying points and making the views of the various interests visible. If panelists do not interact, but simply make individual presentations, there is not much point to having a panel.

The alternatives in setting up a panel are either to select the individual who are most knowledgeable about a topic, or select people who can best represent viewpoints of the various interests. Some consideration may also be given to the mix of personalities to ensure that there is adequate interaction on the one hand, while avoiding undue antagonism on the other.

Panels may be effective either at the beginning of a meeting, to encourage discussion, or as a means of getting reports back from small working groups at the end of a meeting.

Advantages of Panels

Panels permit interaction between experts or leaders which draws out ideas, facts, and issues in front of an audience. As a result they can be used to stimulate further discussion, or to educate an audience.

Limitations of Panels

If the mix of personalities is not right, panels can be dull and uninteresting or degenerate into personal attacks.

Participation is limited to only those on the panel, even though others may have important ideas or comments.

PARTICIPATORY TELEVISION

Since television reaches a large number of people it has potential as a mechanism for public involvement, particularly since the advent of two-way cable television, which permits the audience to send signals back to the station. This could be used to sample opinion during the course of a television pro-

gram.

The major uses of television in public involvement programs to date include:

❑ Televised public meetings, so that people who cannot attend the meeting are aware of the information presented and opinions expressed.

❑ Telethon or call-in shows with agency staff or other experts answering telephone calls from viewers. Questions or comments from viewers are recorded on a time-lag system so that they can be played back to the audience. These programs can be similar to television talk shows where a host, and often one or more guests, respond to calls. Or it is possible to use the telethon format with banks of people answering the phone, summarizing comments received, and sending questions or tallies to the announcer for communication to the audience.

❑ A third approach is to broadcast a program which describes the major issues and alternative courses of action, and invites reaction either by phone, or with a mail-in ballot. In some cases viewers have been organized into small groups to view the program together, participate in a discussion following the program, then express their preferences by mail. Response forms have been distributed through churches, schools, unions, clubs, and so forth. The announcement of these television programs could be made through a newsletter, which could also contain a response form.

❑ On a topic of considerable public interest it may also be possible to obtain a regular, eg. weekly bloc of time on a public or cable station. This program would allow for reports on activities, interviews with leaders of various interest groups, or even debates between representatives of different points of view.

❑ There is considerable interest in the possibilities of two-way cable television as a medium for public involvement. A few cities, notably Columbus, Ohio, have installed such systems and use them as an effective mechanism for participation. The limitations on such systems have primarily to do with the technology, and the cost of installing response units in each home. Some response units permit full verbal response, while others permit only yes/no responses or selection of multiple choice answers.

Although television holds tremendous potential as a medium for participation,

there are also some limitations which must be faced. The bulk of the viewers will prefer to watch their favorite weekly comedy or adventure program, rather than participate in a televised public meeting. Only if the topic is of major public interest is there likely to be much of a viewing audience. As a result, it is difficult to get viewing time on major commercial channels. Instead coverage is likely be limited to public or cable television stations which have a considerably smaller viewing audience. So although the audience will be larger than the audience which would appear at a public meeting, it is still likely to be an educated elite of those deeply interested in the issue.

If television is used to solicit responses, there is also the danger that the responses will be interpreted as if they were a vote, with some expectation that they may be binding on the agency. The viewing audience of a television program is inevitably a nonrepresentative sample, and this is even more true when the viewing audience is small. Voting could also lead to abuses by interest groups, with the results telling more about which groups are well organized than about public opinion.

Advantages of Participatory Television

Participatory television has the potential to reach a very large audience.

This technique is convenient for the public, since people can participate at home by viewing the program and responding by mail, phone, or two-way cable.

A well prepared television program can educate the public about the issues under consideration.

Limitations of Participatory Television

Although the size of the audience will probably be larger than with other public involvement techniques, the audience will still be somewhat unrepresentative of the general public.

Complaints may be made that an agency did not fairly or objectively portray the issue on the television program.

A strong vote in favor of a particular alternative may be a function of an unrepresentative viewing audience, or careful organization by one of the interest groups, rather than an accurate representation of public opinion.

PHONE LINES

People often find it very difficult to locate the right person within an agency when they wish to obtain information about a particular decision. A single telephone number that citizens call to ask questions or make comments can remedy this problem. This number should be easily remembered, and publicized in brochures, reports, news stories, paid advertising, etc. If the study area is very large or if agency offices are far from the study area, the number is usually toll free.

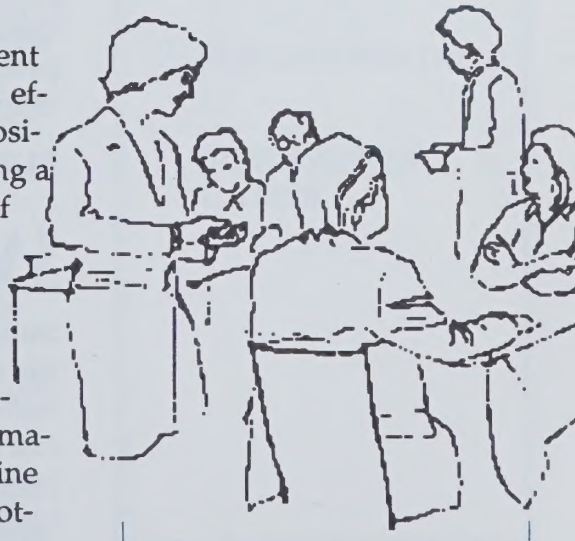
The phone line can be set up in several different ways. It can be a direct phone line to a single staff person whose responsibility is to answer questions and receive comments; it can ring into an office occupied by several staff people; or it can be put on a recording device for phone-backs. There is also potential for use as a phone-in tape library; people wanting information on a particular subject could be played a brief pre-recorded tape on that subject over the phone. If a recording device is used it can also provide information to callers by announcing the date, time and place of future public involvement activities. This can be used as a way of coordinating among members of an advisory group or others active in the public involvement program. Instead of having to call everybody about a meeting, each member can call in and get the needed information from a recorded announcement. A recording device can also be used to record public comment, and incorporate this comment in any public record.

Although there are advantages to the use of recording equipment, many citizens do not like to talk to a machine, and will feel frustrated if that is all they can ever reach. If messages are left on a recording device they should be responded to promptly or credibility will be lost.

Obviously a major consideration in the effectiveness of the phone line will be the interpersonal communication skills of the people handling the phone calls. Defensive or insensitive responses to public comment may produce a negative effect that overrides the positive benefit of establishing a phone line as a means of communication.

Calling the phone line a "hotline" suggests immediate access and response; if an answering machine is used when the line is not staffed, then the hotline is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.

PHONE LINES



Advantages

The phone line helps citizens locate those people within the agency who have the information they need, or to whom they should be speaking regarding specific issues. It can also provide a convenient mechanism for receiving public comments.

A phone line can be a useful mechanism for coordination of public involvement activities, since it provides a single source of information about the time, date and place of various public involvement activities.

Disadvantages

Defensive or insensitive responses to callers' comments may produce a negative reaction from the public.

Staff must be prepared to provide information requested by the public promptly. This can affect other work priorities.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Whenever people work together, meetings must be scheduled. During the course of a public involvement program there can be a number of meetings, often of very different types, from small group planning sessions to meetings attended by several thousand people. Meetings vary in informality from coffee klatches in people's homes to formal hearings with a hearing officer, court reporters and registered speakers. Knowing how to design effective meetings that are appropriate to the situation is an essential skill in conducting public involvement programs. Refer to Chapter 2 for further information on conducting public meetings.

SIMULATION GAMES

Simulation games are designed to provide feedback on the most likely results of making particular policy choices or decisions. By participating in a simulation game, citizens learn about the impact of decisions and the interrelatedness of various features of an environmental or economic system. The simulation game provides a risk-free opportunity for an interest group to take a position on an alternative and receive information about the economic, social and environmental consequences of that position, as well as the reactions of other interest groups.

Games vary greatly in their complexity and the length of time required to play them. Some games can be played with manual game boards or paper and pencil; others require the use of a computer.

Some can be played in a few hours, while others take several days. A game that closely resembles the real situation will usually provide the greatest information; however, a highly realistic game tends to be extremely complex and is therefore more time consuming to learn and play, and often less enjoyable to play. A computer assisted game can consider a larger number of factors than a manual game, but is substantially more expensive to develop and must be played where computer access is available. Numerous universities and consulting firms have developed simulation games, with various degrees of complexity and playability, that are available for use upon payment of a rental or consulting fee.

While simulation games are an effective educational device, they generally do not provide opportunities for the public to comment directly on the proposed action or issue being studied. As a result, they can be used to educate the public and gain enthusiasm for participation in the study, but they must be combined with other techniques designed to solicit comment directly on the issues or action being considered.

Advantages of Simulation Games

A simulation game provides the public with information about the consequences of various policy positions or decisions.

It also provides the public with an understanding of the dynamics of an economic, social, or environmental system.

Participation in a simulation game is usually an enjoyable experience and participants often develop personal relationships that are maintained throughout the entire public involvement process.

Limitations of Simulation Games

Many of the simulation games on the market are confusing, overly technical, or simplistic. Great care must be exercised in selecting a simulation game suitable to the situation. If a customized game must be developed, the costs are generally very high.

Simulation typically does not provide opportunities for comment on the proposed action or issue under study.

Since few games have a perfect fit with reality, citizens may apply the game's rules inappropriately in the real

situation.

People may become so engrossed in the game that they forget about the real issues at hand.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Because an agency can possess greater information than the public and access more resources, the public can feel intimidated by staff. One way to resolve this problem is to provide technical assistance to an advisory group or other representative body, or directly to the public. Technical assistance may include helping various individuals or interest groups analyze issues, evaluate the impact of alternatives, or develop their own alternatives.

Technical assistance can be provided by technical staff as part of their regular jobs, specific staff members can be designated as advisors to interest groups, or money to hire independent consultants can be provided.

A major purpose of providing technical assistance is to ensure that citizens can develop alternatives as technically developed as those of the agency, so that evaluation is fair and equitable. This is especially important when positions on issues differ substantially from those of the agency. Also, in highly controversial situations, technical staff may be mistrusted, in which case the "facts" generated by independent technical advisors may be more acceptable than the "facts" generated by the agency's staff.

The choice between providing assistance with agency staff or with independent consultants is tied to the degree of trust between the agency and the interested publics. If there is a history of public animosity towards the agency, it is probably wise to use independent consultants.

Advantages of Technical Assistance

Provision of technical assistance reduces the likelihood that citizens will feel intimidated by the expertise of technical staff. Interest groups can develop alternatives at a high enough level of expertise to enable equitable evaluation.

If some animosity exists between the agency and citizen groups, the facts generated by independent consultants may be more acceptable to the public than those generated by agency staff – even when they are in agreement.

Limitations of Technical Assistance

If the agency is not open to alternatives, staff who are called on to provide technical assistance may be placed in a position of divided loyalties.

There may be a tendency to provide technical assistance only to the most vocal groups, with the result that a bias is produced in that direction.

TOWN MEETINGS

The term "town meeting" indicates a meeting with no set topics in which people from the community get together with agency officials and talk about whatever is on their minds. No votes are taken, and the discussion is between the audience and agency officials. There is no fixed agenda, so participants can talk about any issues which concern them.

Because there is no specific agenda, the town meeting format may be more suitable to sensitizing top management on public concerns and creating a good relationship with the local community, rather than as a format for discussion of a specific proposed action. Town meetings might be repeated periodically in communities to keep communication lines open and sense issues when they are first emerging.

Refer to Chapter 3 for further information on public meetings.

Advantages of Town Meetings

Town meetings can sensitize management to the concerns of the local community, and may lead to early identification of problems.

Town meetings can develop a pattern of open communication between the agency and the community.

Limitations of Town Meetings

Since town meetings do not have a set agenda they are not a suitable format for meetings on specific proposed actions or plans.

TRADE OFF GAMES

Trade off games are a tool for helping people clarify their priorities and values, and in turn providing the agency with information on what is really most important to people. Often with public involvement programs, people participating in needs studies may indicate that they "want their cake and they want to eat it too". Trade off games are a useful way of helping people understand

that budgets are limited, not everything can be provided, and of soliciting input on which programs/projects people view as the most and least critical.

The term "game" is used to indicate that usually a model of a real situation is used; plus there is usually an element of game playing and strategy involved, so the exercise is entertaining. Games can be custom-designed for a given situation, such as housing issues or social services programming.

Trade off games usually require a workshop setting of a relatively small group of people. They are most effective if the people have already been involved in the program to some extent and have some knowledge of the issues, for example, through having participated in earlier public meetings, a series of advisory committee meetings, or through having completed questionnaires. Carrying out a game requires a time period of two-three hours minimum, to explain the game, play it and discuss results afterwards.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops are usually small meetings which are designed not only for the group to discuss a topic, but actually perform assigned tasks, generating a group "product". They can be established specifically around a problem solving task. Many of the guidelines for advisory groups apply to holding workshops (See Chapter 2).

EXTENDED INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

One of the most frequently used public involvement techniques is the establishment of an advisory committee. Advisory committees go under a variety of names, including citizens' committees, consumer advisory councils or panels, task forces, technical advisory committees, working groups, and so forth. While each of these names means something different, they all describe the establishment of a relatively small group of people who represent various interests, points of view, or fields of expertise, to advise on proposed actions.

For further information on advisory committees see Chapter 3.

CHARRETTES

A charrette is a prolonged meeting or series of meetings that brings all the essential publics together in an attempt to achieve mutual agreement. The essential philosophy behind a charrette is to get together everybody required to obtain an agreement, and to keep them together until an agreement has been reached. As a result, some charrettes are marathon sessions lasting an entire weekend or week. Some charrettes have even been twenty-four-hours-a-day ventures, with food and sleeping quarters provided to participants.

Three elements of a charrette are crucial to its success:

1. All major publics must be present.

2. All participants must agree to remain in the meeting, however long it takes to resolve differences and arrive at a plan that is acceptable to all parties.

3. All individuals who attend the charrette must come with the expectation that the product of the meeting will be a plan that is acceptable to all participants, and any decisions must reflect the consensus of all participants.

A charrette can help achieve agreement within a short time among various publics and agencies, or resolve an impasse among various groups on an issue which requires prompt resolution, eg. emergency draining of reservoirs, clean-up of PCBs and so forth. Without a

sense of urgency, agency interest groups leaders may not be willing to commit the time to "hang-in" until the issue is resolved.

A charrette does involve considerable preparation, usually by a steering committee representing the key interests or agencies that will be involved.

Advantages of a Charrette

A charrette can be an effective means of achieving a consensus among conflicting groups or interests. As all the critical actors are involved, agreement on a plan should result in a commitment to implementation by all parties. In addition, participants in a charrette gain a better understanding of the positions held by other groups, and they may even change their perspectives. In fact, some charrettes have resulted in feelings of teamwork and cooperation that have extended beyond the individual issue which was the topic of the charrette.

Limitations of a Charrette

A charrette is effective only when all parties have sufficient sense of urgency or priority that they are willing to make the time commitment to participate until the issue is resolved. A charrette can only work if groups or agencies are willing to live with the commitments made by their representatives who attended the charrette. Also, because of the time commitment involved, some citizens are unable to participate in charrettes because of child care and work requirements.

TASK FORCES

A task force is a form of advisory group. The term "task force" is usually reserved for a group that has a specific task to accomplish, and then is dissolved, as contrasted with other kinds of advisory groups which are continuing in nature. Refer to Chapter 3 for detailed guidelines on handling advisory groups and committees.

JOINT PLANNING TECHNIQUES

ARBITRATION

Arbitration is a process in which parties to a conflict agree to the selection of a neutral third party who will serve as arbitrator. Each side presents its position to the arbitrator who, after whatever research is needed, states what he or she believes to be an equitable solution. Arbitration can either be binding, when all parties have agreed in advance to accept the arbitrator's recommendation, or non-binding, when all sides reserve judgment until after seeing the arbitrator's recommendations. Even in non-binding arbitration the arbitrator's recommendation can carry considerable weight, since groups that will not accept the recommendation may appear to be unreasonable and lose either their members' support, or outside political support.

Normally arbitration is commonly used in those cases where the sides cannot reach agreement because for one side to get something the other must give up something, yet there is enough mutual dependence that neither side can afford to have the issue remain unresolved.

In recent years there has been an interest in applying the principles of labour/management negotiations to environmental or consumer controversies. This has resulted in an interest in the use of arbitration. For arbitration to work, however, there has to be an acceptable third party, and a political situation in which all sides lose more by having the issue unresolved than they do by fighting on.

Advantages of Arbitration

The advantage of arbitration is that the judgment as to an equitable solution is made by an uninvolved third party, who takes the time to be thoroughly informed. Also, if arbitration is binding, or it is politically unacceptable for groups to oppose the arbitrator's recommendations, then the issue is actually resolved.

Disadvantages of Arbitration

There are several preconditions which must be met before arbitration is possible:

1) All parties to the conflict must accept that they stand to lose more if they do not

get a timely resolution than they could from any recommendation of the arbitrator.

2) There must be a third party acceptable to all groups.

3) There usually must be a willingness to live by the arbitrator's recommendations, or political pressure, which require that both parties take the arbitrator's recommendations seriously.

In addition to being useful only in limited circumstances, arbitration is also a kind of "last hope" technique. If it fails, the potential for conflict resolution is limited.

CONCILIATION

Conciliation is generally an effort to improve communications between conflicing parties, to allow them to negotiate conflict. It differs from either mediation or arbitration in that there may not be any formal acceptance of the conciliator's role by the parties. To use an international example: i.e. One country may attempt to bring about better communication between two other countries that are in conflict. Because there is no formal agreement on the conciliator's role, either side may break off discussions without losing face. If the conciliation effort is successful, the conciliation phase will end when the two countries formally agree to enter into negotiations or peace talks.

The ability of a federal agency to act as a conciliator may be limited since the agency may be a party to the conflict, rather than having the neutrality necessary to be a conciliator. Only if the conflict is between other parties could the agency act as conciliator. However, the agency could seek out a conciliator to assist in resolving any conflict in which it is involved.

In the future, regulatory bodies may be more active in adopting the posture of conciliator, attempting to work things out by mutual agreement rather than having to choose sides and perpetuate win/lose conflicts. An increasing number of regulatory bodies are encouraging applicants to conduct their own public involvement prior to presenting their application, so that as many issues as possible are resolved before the regulatory body is put in the position of having to choose between conflicting positions.

Advantages of Conciliation

A third party may be able to bring about improved com-

munications leading to negotiations between conflicting parties, when it would mean a loss of face or power for either of the parties to suggest the desirability of negotiations. Both parties get brought into the conflict without any suggestion that one of the groups made the first move, which might imply weakness, or a soft position.

A conciliator may be able to clarify the positions of the groups to each other, removing stereotypes and identifying commonalities.

Disadvantages of Conciliation

The conciliator has very limited power in the situation and can pull off an agreement only if the sides are convinced they can win more by negotiation than by continuing confrontation. Without some kind of leverage or power, the conciliator is often unable to get the parties to the bargaining table.

MEDIATION

The practices of labor/management mediation have been applied with some success in resolving controversies involving environmental and energy issues. The key element in mediation is the intervention of a disinterested third-party who helps the parties reach agreements. The mediator not only structures the deliberations, but also serves as a conduit for communication among the parties.

Mediation is possible only when the various interests to a conflict believe they can accomplish more by negotiation than by continuing to fight. This will normally occur when all sides recoginize that they have more to lose with a stalemate than through negotiation. A powerful third party may also bring about mediation if the threat of action by the third party is greater than the possible losses experienced in negotiation.

Advantages of Mediation

Mediation can result in an agreement that is supported by all parties to a conflict.

A mediator suggests productive procedure which enables parties to focus on the substantive issues of a controversy. Mediation can lead to a faster resolution of issues than other procedures that may be dragged out through the legal or political system.

Limitations of Mediation

Mediation, like negotiation, is voluntary. It will work only when all parties to the conflict agree to accept a me-

diator. The technique requires the services of a skilled and credible third party mediator.

NEGOTIATION

Negotiation is a voluntary process in which all parties in a conflict agree to sit down and try to resolve their differences. Parties agree on the procedures they will use, educate each other about their respective issues and interests, generate alternatives and evaluate acceptable options. If successful, negotiations result in an agreement that all parties are willing to live with. Decisions are made by concensus. Representatives are appointed with the understanding that the organizations they represent will have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of any agreements that are reached. Negotiation has been used in the environmental area to resolve differences over local projects and it has been applied to contoversial federal programs and policies.

Advantages of Negotiation

Negotiation provides a forum for all parties to educate each other about a problem and to jointly identify workable solutions. It prvides an alternative to adversarial activities. This approach places the responsibility on all the parties to find a solution that they all can live with. Agreements reached through negotiation are more likely to be workable and to be implemented.

Disadvantages of Negotiation

All parties must be represented. Sometimes one or more parties does not want to participate. Because the process is voluntary, parties can drop out at any time and possibly terminate the discussions. Parties must be willing and able to act in good faith. The issues must be subject to negotiation. It can take more time to reach a negotiated agreement than it does to let a company or agency make a decision. It may be difficult to conduct when time is limited.

NIAGARA PROCESS

The Niagara process is a consultation/concensus building approach developed by the Niagara Institute in southern Ontario. It has been used in several instances by Environment Canada in the development of new legislation and is discussed in greater detail in Volume 2. It has been used to obtain concensus among a wide variety of interest groups, such as governments, industry, labour and non-government organizations. It is probably most appropriate for problem-

solving and policy development applications, rather than the environmental aspects of project siting.

NEGOTIATION

NIAGARA PROCESS

ALPHABETICAL INDEX

* A **bold entry** indicates a chapter description.

Appendix I
List of Other Resource Materials

A considerable body of literature regarding public involvement has been developing in recent years. The list below is not all-inclusive, but does include most of the materials which would be of greatest assistance to people actually conducting public involvement programs.

General

Ducsik, Dennis W., Edison Electric Institute's Workshop on Utility Experience with Advance Public Participation in Planning - Proceedings, Washington D.C.; Edison Electric Institute, 1982. A brief synopsis of a conference at which utility people working with public involvement discussed their experiences.

Creighton, James L. and Jerry Delli Priscoli, eds., Public Involvement Techniques: A Reader of Ten-Years Experience at the Institute for Water Resources, (IWR Report-82-R1), Fort Belvoir, Virginia: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Institute for Water Resources, 1983. A compendium of articles on virtually all public involvement techniques.

Jordan, D., et al, Effective Citizen Participation in Transportation Planning - Vol. 2, A Catalog of Techniques, Washington D.D.: U.S. Department of Transportation (FHWA), 1976. An early catalog of major public involvement techniques.

Langton, Stuart (Editor), Citizen Participation Perspectives: Proceedings of the National Conference on Public Involvement, Lincoln Filene Center for Citizenship and Public Affairs, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, 1979. A collection of presentations made at the National Conference on Citizen Participation in 1978. Includes articles by most of the major figures in the field, and includes articles on consumer affairs and citizen action, as well as public involvement.

Connor, Desmond M. Constructive Citizen Participation, A Resource Book, Rev. Ed. 1985, Development Press, Victoria, British Columbia. A comprehensive collection of how-to-do-it articles, relevant professional papers and case studies.

William D. Coplin, Donald J. McMaster and Michael K. O'Leary "Creating A Policy Profile" in Public Involvement Techniques: A Reader of Ten Years Experience at the Institute for Water Resources. James Creighton, Jerry Delli Priscoli, and C. Mark Dunning (eds.). IWR Research Project 82-R1, May 1983.

Environment Council of Alberta. Involvement and Environment - Proceedings of the Canadian Conference on Public Participation. Ed. by Barry Sadler. 1978. 2 vols. Edmonton, Alberta. The proceedings of this national conference serve to provide a theoretical overview of the state of the art of public involvement in environmental issues. Although ten years old, many of the issues discussed are very valid today.

Farrell, G. M.; Melin, J. P.; and Stacey, S. R. Involvement: A Saskatchewan Perspective. Prepared for the Department of the Environment, Government of Saskatchewan. Undated. A brief report, but with considerable substance. The report reviews various types of public involvement and briefly describes some of the various techniques.

Ministry of Forests, Province of British Columbia. Public Involvement Handbook. Prepared by Dr. Bruce Fraser. 1981. Information Services, Victoria, British Columbia. This manual is a "workbook" on public involvement in the forestry sector. An easy to use manual guiding practition-ers in public involvement, well illustrated with diagrams and a fictional example drawn from the forest industry. The guidelines suggested are applicable to many situations beyond the forest sector.

Constructive Citizen Participation - a quarterly newsletter containing news items about the field from across Canada and the U.S., articles on techniques, case studies, and book reviews.

Advisory Groups

Widditsch, Ann, Guide 2: Working Effectively with Advisory Committees, Washington D.C., U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1977. A very good short guide on working with advisory groups.

Interviewing

Richardson, S.A., et al, Interviewing, New York: Basic Books,

1964. An overview of general methodology.

Issues Management

Wilson, Ian. "The Benefits of Environmental Analysis," in Albert, Kenneth J. Ed. The Strategic Management Handbook, McGraw Hill 1983, pp. 9-1 to 9-19.

Coates, F.F. Issues Management. Lomond Publications, 1986.

Thomas, Philip S. "Environmental Scanning - The State of the Art".

Mediation

Talbott, Allan R., Settling Things: Six Case Studies in Environmental Mediation, Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation and the Ford Foundation, 1983. A discussion of the use of mediation in an effort to resolve six environmental controversies.

Meetings

Ragan, James F., Guide 1: Effective Public Meetings, Washington D.C.: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1977. A good short summary of what it takes to plan a public meeting.

Doyle, Michael and David Strauss, How to Make Meetings Work, Chicago, Illinois: Playboy Press, 1976. A best-selling book on designing and facilitating public meetings.

Polls

Babbie, Earl R., Survey Research Methods, Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1973. An introduction to the field of survey research.

Small Group Meeting Techniques

Gordon, W.J., Synectics, New York: Harper & Row, 1961. An excellent discussion of brainstorming techniques.

Delbecq, Andre L. and Andrew H. Van de Ven, "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning", Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, Vol. 7, Number 4. A complete description of Nominal Group Process.

Public Involvement: Planning and Implementing Public Involvement Programs

If you have any public involvement case studies which you think are noteworthy and would like to share with others in this field, have any interesting experiences using this manual, or have questions or comments, please contact FEARO at the following address:

FEARO
Hull, Quebec
K1A 0H3

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